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## Exploring Teachers' Interpretations Of Feedback In Primary Literacy Classroom Settings

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# Exploring Teachers' Interpretations Of Feedback In Primary Literacy Classroom Settings.

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
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## **Abstract**

It is now widely acknowledged that formative assessment can be beneficial to students' learning. However, there is also evidence that teachers encounter a range of issues in the enactment of formative practice inside the classroom (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012; Swaffield, 2011). This study investigates teachers' interpretations of feedback in terms of theory and practice and it explores how this might be informed by their conceptions of learning in the context of primary literacy lessons.

This research involves three Year 5 teachers and one Year 4 from three different primary schools in London. The main sources of data comprise classroom observations and teachers' interviews. The lessons observed were centred on teacher feedback relating to language and literacy issues in ordinary classroom settings. A semi-structured interview format was used to explore the teachers' interpretation and intentions in the feedback process. Follow-up interviews with the teachers were carried out in order to ask them to comment on specific instances informed by the lessons observed.

The main findings reveal diverse perspectives and nuances that arise when teachers describe the complexities involved with verbal and written forms of feedback. Furthermore, the data analysis illustrates how the intersection between principles of assessment and individual teacher's views on learning, influence the different ways in which they manage to balance competing priorities for expressing quality of work; and how their feedback practice relates to what they believe formative assessment is. It is envisaged that this study contributes to our understanding of the conceptual and pedagogic complexity of teacher feedback in formative assessment. The implications of this work are relevant to teacher professional development and school development.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **General Overview**

This study investigates actions and interactions related to feedback, which is achieved by probing the ways that the teachers interpret these actions and it seeks to explore what might be the views about learning held by the participants that underlie their assessment practices. The inquiry was made, following a qualitative stance, by engaging three teachers of Year 5 classes and one of a Year 4 from three different primary schools in London, who declared an interest in implementing feedback as a strategy for formative assessment.

Formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning, has been noticeably developed and widely referred to within international educational discourse since a review by Black & Wiliam was published in 1998 (Swaffield, 2011). Black & Wiliam's (1998) contribution involved an examination of research evidence relating to the impact of formative assessment on students' learning. The great range and variety in the research studies they analysed demonstrates that formative assessment might improve students' achievements, but their work also converges to show that there are significant issues encountered by teachers when trying to facilitate further learning inside the classroom. Bennett (2011) posed some concerns about the alleged effect sizes reported in Black & Wiliam's original article, by considering that the evidence seemed far too dissimilar to be synthesised statistically. My own study was not aimed at measuring the effectiveness of formative feedback, but rather, the purpose was to examine its complexity by observing the phenomenon as naturally occurring in classroom settings. Within this perspective, the scholarly review by Black & Wiliam (1998) provides both enlightening examples of practice that allow for an understanding of the main areas within which the formative function of assessment might thrive and an insightful analysis of those issues that seem to undermine any expected changes in classroom work.

In this study, feedback is understood as one of the salient constituent elements in formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Feedback information is relevant in terms of helping pupils to develop a sense of quality of work and beyond that to set the foundations to strengthen their ability for self- and peer-assessment (Sadler, 1989, 1007,2010). Feedback, within this perspective, involves defining, signifying and interpreting aspects of quality. To achieve this, some properties or criteria that might represent a task as being well performed should be selected and invoked. Which criteria are brought into play and how this work is enacted in the classroom is linked with assumptions about what and how pupils should learn (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 2007, 2010). Consequently, for this study, a focus on feedback required an immersion into the process of classroom learning so as to capture it within verbal interaction and with reference to that provided in pupils' written assignments. This brought to the fore various intertwined issues that helped in the understanding of teachers' views about formative assessment.

- **Why I became interested in studying these issues?**

In my home country, Chile, a reform of the national curriculum was carried out in the 90s. The proponents declared amongst its guiding principles those derived from a constructivist view of learning (Huidobro et al., 1990). I worked as a secondary teacher at that time and I was concerned about what would be the implications for assessment in the context of this initiative. I decided to materialise my interests throughout my master's degree study and I found that, suggestions in the literature regarding the enactment of self-assessment were understood, in practice, as having pupils giving marks to their own pieces of work and that of the others. However, processes of further reflection to identify weaknesses or strengths or to analyse how the work might be improved, seemed almost absent from teachers' descriptions and from the practices observed. What I learnt from this was that assessment was not fully responding to these new insights about learning, which demand that pupils play a more active role. This, in turn, left me wondering whether the lack of such initiatives could be explained by the long tradition of a behaviourist perspective driven learning and assessment, by the insufficient reference to assessment within policy documents, or because key concepts have been misinterpreted in theory and practice.

In 2004, I joined the University of Concepcion, as a teacher educator. From that experience, I gained the impression that, the shift of emphasis from a view of assessment centred on products towards a concept of assessment that accentuates the use of evidence in order to improve learning, had become a topic of interest that was often referred to amongst teachers as well as within educational discourse. Indeed, the Ministry of Education published a book that explicitly referred to formative assessment or the Assessment for Learning Approach, explaining its main tenets and including a variety of examples and materials to support its implementation in schools (MINEDUC, 2006). This book drew on the work by Black & Wiliam (1998), Black et al., (2003) and The Assessment Reform Group (2002), amongst others. Throughout this resource, we have access to a more comprehensive view of formative assessment, relying not only on a set of techniques, but also revising the conveyed ideas lying behind them. This stimulated me to introduce this approach to my student-teachers and to the teaching staff in the schools that I was involved with. However, two important assumptions led to my engagement with formative assessment being extended further. First, it seemed that practices in the schools were still far from being congruent with this perspective, in spite of it having been more than a decade since the educational reform in Chile. Second, I came to realise that this approach to assessment had greatly captivated my interest and so, I felt compelled to investigate it further so as to acquire a deeper understanding. Consequently, I started my PhD journey on formative assessment and I went to King's College with the consideration that it has a long tradition of helping teachers to understand and enact assessment for learning.

- **The Research Questions**

To gain insights regarding assessment with an emphasis on how to improve pupils learning, the attention necessarily needs to focus on what goes on inside the classroom. Black & Wiliam (1998) identified questioning, feedback, sharing criteria and self- assessment as pivotal to developing formative assessment. This contribution and the subsequent work by Black et al. (2003), propose a note of caution regarding not using them as fixed techniques without reflection on the underlying principles that drive their implementation and what should be considered is that the benefits

they can reach 'only apply to authentic interpretation' (2003:122). This implies there is a need to take into account the theoretical developments on learning perspectives as the implementation of formative assessment involves a change in roles for teachers and students (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003; James, 2006; Mansell et al., 2009; Swaffield, 2011). Furthermore, it is widely recognised that assessment undertaken for accountability and certification favours a grading function, rather than the learning intention (Black et al., 2003). Hence, the enactment of formative assessment is not unproblematic (Torrance & Pryor, 1998), which is precisely why these issues needed to be revisited. The literature suggests that a better understanding of the true principles of formative assessment can help to achieve its foremost purpose –the students learning. Consequently, I started this research endeavour by choosing feedback as one of the most salient issues and as an entry point that would allow me to examine formative assessment in depth.

The purpose of this study went beyond documenting teachers' actions regarding feedback –*what they do*–, for it was also aimed at investigating their own perspectives –*what they believe*. That is, whilst the provision of rich descriptions of feedback practices was sought, gaining access to participants' reflections on their own work was also envisaged. The study was driven by the following overarching research question:

- *How do teachers interpret feedback from a theoretical and practical stand point in relation to their teaching and their students' learning?*

This prime inquiry was tackled through addressing a set of sub-questions that pertained to shedding light on the subject matter of interest by having access to teachers' actions and interpretations in the interplay that took place between teaching, learning and assessment:

- *What are the teachers' feedback practices and the underlying principles that guide them in the actual conducting of classroom interaction and through pupils written assignments?*

- *What are the notions that teachers recognise as salient within a formative assessment approach and how do they explain their meanings?*
- *How much do assumptions about learning underpin teachers' feedback practices?*

- **Outline of the Research**

This thesis comprises nine chapters, starting with this General Overview. Chapter 2, the Literature Review begins with a discussion of the general focus underlying my study, namely, the formative purpose of assessment. Then, an account is provided regarding how the terms formative assessment and assessment for learning have evolved in the literature. This is followed by an exploration of Sadler's (1989, 2007, 2010) approach to feedback and consideration of a range of studies that have examined its quality and role in promoting learning. Throughout this analysis, the intention is to explain my decision for choosing feedback to addressing this research. In this chapter, there is also particular consideration of the different perspectives in relation to the communicating criteria from the point of view of the teacher and their use and interpretation by pupils. Next, some developments in classroom talk and questioning are contrasted, to illustrate their connection with formative assessment. Subsequently, teachers' models of cognition and learning are outlined, with the aim being to elucidate their links and implications for assessment. To conclude the chapter, I refer to inquiries that have helped teachers to develop their formative assessment strategies and that have contributed to extending the theoretical understanding in this area. These endeavours also reflect why formative assessment is an issue that continues to stimulate research (Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001; Black et al., 2003; Hargreaves, 2005; James, 2006, 2012; Mansell *et al.*, 2009; Swaffield, 2011).

Chapter three, the Methodology, involves an exploration of the key issues raised by the literature review. A qualitative stance is adopted to understand the phenomena under discussion in some depth (Cohen et al., 2011; Silverman, 2011). The participant teachers were selected according to a purposive sampling rationale (Cohen et al., 2011; Simons, 2009; Mason, 2002). The chapter explores the period and phases of

data collection (October 2013-March 2014), making reference to the process of classroom observation and the interviewing of the teachers. It also describes the perspectives and procedures for data analysis and finishes with reflections on pertinent ethical considerations.

The thesis presents four results chapters, which are entitled as below, using the participant teachers' pseudonyms and modified school names:

- Chapter 4: Sophie, Class Teacher, St. Andrew's Primary School;
- Chapter 5: Steve, Class Teacher, St. Albert's Primary School;
- Chapter 6: Carolyn, Class Teacher, St. Thomas's Primary School;
- Chapter 7: Lily, Class teacher, St. Thomas's Primary School.

These chapters all follow the same structure. First, a description of the main components of the school policy on feedback is provided, in order to situate or contextualise each teacher's experience in the classroom. Next, the class teacher is presented, giving a preliminary overview about how she/ he described feedback and formative assessment. Then, the results section is developed, which is composed of a number of subsections. The first contains the observation data and presents an analysis of selected classroom episodes or events that had the potential for feedback to occur. This is followed by analysis of the follow up interviews that document some reflections from the teacher regarding her/his own assessment practices, within his/her lessons. Next, the teacher's approach to written forms of feedback is explained by drawing on the information gathered from the semi-structured interview. The chapter includes the corresponding summaries that portray every participant's focus and emphasis when carrying out feedback in the form of verbal interaction as well as for their students' written assignments.

Chapter 8, the Discussion, synthesises the evidence contained in the four previous chapters. It is subdivided into the following subsections. The first, reports on the diversity of views held by the participant teachers in relation to core notions, such as providing next steps to learners (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam 2006, 2012; ARG, 2002; Mansell et al., 2009). Subsequently, the evidence is further interrogated to elicit whether feedback is conceptualised in terms of its original intention, i.e. promoting

improvements, or whether it emphasises making corrections. The second subsection discusses the extent to which the assessment strategies implemented by the teachers helped their pupils to explore and come to understand what quality means with respect to a piece of work (Sadler, 1989). In this regard, the findings reveal insightful distinctions amongst the teachers' repertoires of practices and intentions. Moreover, different underlying assumptions emerged when feedback was offered in spoken interactions to when the teachers were collecting evidence from learners in their written tasks. The last section of this chapter reviews the underlying principles of learning that the teachers appeared to subscribe to and the extent to which these were related to their approaches to assessment in the classroom.

Chapter 9, the Concluding Remarks, summarises the key findings that have emerged from my study. I consider in parallel the participant teachers' accounts and the observation of their practices. By so doing, significant insights pertaining to the principles and frameworks that seemed to drive their actions and decisions when providing feedback to their pupils emerge. These outcomes confirm that formative assessment is a multifaceted and multi-layered phenomenon, which in turn leads to some implications and recommendations for further research that comprise the final matter to be addressed in this thesis.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature and foregrounds the main theoretical insights that inform my study. The discussion raises developments that illustrate how formative assessment is conceptualised and the issues that emerge from its enactment in classroom practice, which have led to me choosing to focus this research from the teachers' perspective. Theoretically, this reflects the main dimensions that are investigated, namely, teachers' interpretations about feedback and their assumptions about learning, which underlie their assessment practices.

Section 2.2 addresses the approach and concepts used in framing the study. It begins by making a distinction between summative and formative purposes of assessment, whilst also explaining that the latter forms the general focus underpinning this work. This is followed by a discussion that explores how both concepts, formative assessment and assessment for learning, have progressively evolved.

Section 2.3 concentrates on the overarching points that shape my decisions in conducting this study. It examines evidence relating to feedback as one of the crucial issues implied in formative assessment. It draws on Sadler's (1989,2007,2010) approach to feedback that highlights its role in supporting pupils in developing a sense of quality in their work and brings to the fore various intertwined issues, such as how teachers externalise aspects of quality, and how students interpret feedback and the success criteria. This is complemented by an exploration of a range of studies that investigated feedback quality and the role it plays in learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Kluger & Denisi, 1996; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Next, Perrenoud's (1998) analysis on the role of formative assessment in the regulation of student's learning is sketched out. To complete this section, there is an outline of how differentiated feedback affects pupils' performance by referring, amongst others, to Black & Wiliam (1998, 2003), Butler (1987, 1988) and Brookhart (2008).

Section 2.4 explores some developments in classroom talk and questioning, with a particular focus on teachers' interpretations of student responses. It singles out the contributions made by Sinclair & Coulthard (1975, 1992) and Mehan (1979), as both investigated how classroom discourse is structured and categorised teaching exchanges into triadic traditional sequences. This is contrasted by presenting the work of Alexander (2004, 2008) on dialogic teaching and then, there is an explanation of the approach towards exploratory talk by Mercer (2000). Both of these proposals seem to be more in line with the transformations that are needed in order to carry out formative assessment. The section then provides an analysis on questioning, in particular, describing its distinctive nature and for the purpose of raising its relevance as an indicator of the possibilities for teacher and students to achieve a common understanding within interaction (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 2003, 2012).

Section 2.5 examines models of cognition and of learning, as well as the possible link with the principles of formative assessment. James (2006) is used to highlight the main implications of each learning perspective regarding the ways in which knowledge is assessed, the content and focus of feedback, the definition of learning goals and the role played by pupils and teachers. The section specifically refers to: constructivism and socio-cultural theory (Vigotsky, 1978); activity theory (Engestrom, 1999), and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991,) with the contributions of a number of other writers who have commented on its core notions. The section ends by describing the sociocultural approach to formative assessment put forward by Pryor & Crossouard (2008), which advocates a view of assessment as a social practice.

Finally, Section 2.6 encompasses a description of the contributions of relevant research projects that have focused on investigating and/or developing innovations regarding formative assessment with teachers. The findings cover research studies including: the King's College Medway Oxford Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP) (Black *et al.*, 2003, 2004); Learning How to Learn - In the Classrooms, Schools and Network Project (James & Pedder, 2006; Pedder & James, 2012); the study by Marshall & Drummond (2006), which sheds light on how teachers engage with assessment for learning inside the classroom; Teacher Assessment at key stage 1, Accomplishing Assessment in the

Classroom (TASK) (Torrance & Pryor, 1998); and The Primary Response Research and Development Project (Torrance & Pryor, 2001), which addresses convergent and divergent approaches to assessment. The section concludes with discussion on the prime insights gained from studying this body of research to shape my understanding of the main issues underlying my own study.

## **2.2. The formative purpose of assessment**

Formative assessment can be traced back to the work of Scriven (1967), who was the first to make a distinction between formative and summative evaluation, which were related to the curriculum programme and teaching (Black & Wiliam, 2003; Gardner, 2012; Leahy & Wiliam, 2012). One basis for this primary distinction seems to be 'when' the evaluation is carried out, and if differentiation is the intended action. That is, it is 'mainly a matter of the use to which evaluation is put' (Scriven, 1996: 153).

Interpreting the work of Bloom *et al.* (1971), Black & Wiliam (2003) suggest that these researchers used the terms in a similar vein to how they are currently conceptualised, as they describe summative evaluation tests as those which aim to give grades at the end of a course to certify students' attainments or evaluate the effectiveness of an educational programme. This sort of test differs from evaluation that Bloom and colleagues call formative, which is intended to help students, teachers and curriculum makers in improving what they need to do. Specifically, these authors refer to the purpose of formative assessment as follows:

'...The purpose is not to grade or certify the learner; it is to help both the learner and the teacher focus upon the particular learning necessary for movement towards mastery...' (Bloom *et al.*, 1971:61)

It could be said that these writers are primarily concerned with the process of student assessment rather than programme evaluation (Black & Wiliam, 2003; Newton, 2007). Likewise, Bennett (2011) also refers to Bloom's (1969) formative and summative distinction and accentuates its focus on students, where the formative is characterised by providing feedback to pupils during the learning and teaching process, whereas

summative entails judging pupil performance at the end of a course.

More recent developments attribute a great range of uses to educational assessment. Newton (2007) identifies 18 categories of purposes. He brings out the issue of discerning how a single set of information, collected through assessment, can be suitable for fulfilling a wider range of interpretations and the consequences derived from these. He argues that the different uses given to assessment information should call for considerable variations within its design. Seemingly, this author raises the question as to whether the formative-summative dichotomy should be drawn. By contrast, Harlen and James' (1997) early proposal to relate formative and summative assessment suggests that their separate functions should be preserved. They contend that when both purposes become blurred the actual enactment of formative assessment can be jeopardised. Further work by Harlen (2005, 2012) describes possible dimensions of assessment purposes and practices within a continuum. At one extreme, assessment aims to provide feedback and to give next steps in learning, whilst at the other, it is meant to record the achievements of learners and to report to different audiences. Between both ends, the author argues that a range of practices holding various functions or roles can be found. However, the argument concerning the maintaining of the formative-summative distinction is still upheld (Harlen, 2005, 2012). This because, as the author explains, there are some limitations in using assessment information that has been collected for formative purposes, to report on achievements. For instance, one difficulty concerns dealing with transient data without resulting in a tick-list approach or implementing many tasks that are actually summative in character. There are also constraints, the author adds, in using evidence gathered for summative purposes and making it suitable to help learning. For example, carry out summative tests with a formative intention, can lead to the preparation of the kind of questions that are contained in external tests. As Black et al. (2003) have noticed earlier, the influence of external testing can change the focus 'from developing understanding to teaching to the test' (2003:56). Harlen (2012) also advocates that while in both cases a number of issues emerge in the dual use of evidence, when formative procedures are well placed and moderated there is more room for the evidence gathered by the teachers to meet summative requirements, but this is not so in the reverse situation. Again, she contends that this imbalance is a reason for keeping

the formative-summative distinction.

In accordance with the above, Harlen (2005, 2012) points out that it is important to know for what reasons the assessment information has been collected and what use is given to that evidence. Similarly, Mansell *et al.* (2009) recommend carefully paying attention to the same issue, as assessments designed for one purpose might not support all different kinds of interpretations, a point also raised earlier by Newton (2007). However, Mansell and colleagues go further and highlight the need to distinguish between the intended uses of assessment data and their actual ones. They comment on Newton's classification of the multiple uses to which assessment results are put and note that these still can be considered broad categories, because detailed examination of each one may contribute to enlarging the list.

Having stated the previous considerations, Mansell *et al.* (2009) attempt to simplify this multiplicity of assessment uses and group them into three broad purposes, which is also a distinction commonly adopted and referred to elsewhere in the literature (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black *et al.*, 2003). The three clusters of uses of assessment are summarised as follows.

- It can serve to hold the schools and the whole system accountable through the publications of results. This leads to outsider stakeholders making comparisons and hence, making judgments on the quality of those being reported.
- It certifies pupils' attainment through tests and examination results, information that is provided to parents, higher educational institutions and to prospective employers. As such, assessment data are used as a means for selection, as they have implications both in terms of admission to subsequent stages of education and in relation to work.
- It can help to promote pupil's learning or understanding on the basis of the information gathered during every day lessons. Consequently, it entails the interrelatedness between assessment and classroom learning.

The assumption adopted within this research inquiry is consistent with this third purpose, which accentuates the use of evidence in supporting students' learning in the context of the teaching process (Black & Wiliam 1998, 2003; Gardner, 2012). This day-to-day assessment, usually informal, can be characterised as formative in the sense that it explores pupils' understanding in such a way that the teacher can be better informed in making decisions to support and to guide students, so as to take the learning forward (Mansell *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, for this study, formative assessment is interpreted as embedded into teaching and learning, which is illustrated in the definition given by Black *et al.* (2003:2).

‘An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes *formative assessment* when the evidence is used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs’.

It should be noted that this notion encompasses relevant issues which need further examination in order to fully understand its foundations. For instance, it would involve an exploration of approaches to feedback; the study of the process of self- and- peer-assessment, the searching into studies trying to understand how this intended purpose of assessment-supporting learning- might be instantiated in practice. So, I return to the significant developments on these themes in subsequent sections. However, first, I pay attention to how more recent interpretations of formative assessment are tightly associated with assessment *for* learning, indeed, both phrases, are often used interchangeably in the extant literature and research (ARG, 2002; Black & Wiliam, 2003, 2004; Harlen, 2009; Gardner, 2012).

### **2.2.1 Formative assessment and assessment for learning**

Leahy & Wiliam (2012) set out the provenance of the term assessment *for* learning and ascribe its first use to Harry Black in the year 1986. After this, they explain, the term was used by Mary James at a conference held in 1992, in the USA. Next, the phrase appeared as the title of Sutton's (1995) book. What follows in the chronological sequence, stated by these authors, is to draw attention to the work by Gipps and Stobart in the year 1997 that refers to the term assessment *for* learning to make a

distinction between it and assessment *of* learning. The first concept conveys a sense of comprehensive assessment of the quality of students' understanding, whilst the second notion embraces grading, reporting, i.e. certification and accountability. Then, the authors highlight the contribution by the UK Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002), a voluntary group of researchers who have worked together since 1989 and have made it possible to disseminate the contrast between both terms to a wider educational audience.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) commissioned Paul Black & Dylan Wiliam (1998) to review classroom formative assessment. Their review and further work have reflected a shift of interest and attention from the role of assessment in terms of testing and grading towards the role of assessment in classroom learning. This is outlined in the definition that follows:

‘Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to identify where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there’. (ARG, 2002:2)

This conceptualisation is expounded and elaborated upon alongside ten principles in an effort to guiding assessment practices within this approach (ARG, 2002:2):

1. is part of effective planning;
2. focuses on how students learn;
3. is central to classroom practice;
4. is a key professional skill;
5. has an emotional impact;
6. affects learners' motivation;
7. promotes commitment to learning goals and assessment criteria;
8. helps learners know how to improve;
9. encourages self-assessment;
10. recognises all achievements

ARG's definition regarding formative assessment as a process entails a role for students as well as for teachers. It brings to the fore the importance of reflecting on

the information gathered in order to help pupils to improve their learning and for teachers to enhance their teaching (Swaffield, 2011). It could be said that the term assessment *for* learning denotes to a greater extent the interrelatedness amongst assessment and learning, hence specifically promoting learning as its prime aim and not as a subsidiary or secondary one. This is also reflected in the concept put forward by Black et al. (2004:10):

‘Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the ‘purpose of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence...’

This notion is enlarged with a second part, which essentially refers to the role of feedback as an assessment activity that can actually help learning (Black *et al.* 2004). This thought, in turn, had been already elaborated by Black *et al.* (2003) (see section 2.2). Thus, both terms formative assessment and assessment for learning emphasize the same purpose of assessment. Consequently, both terms are referred to in the authors report on the King’s-Medway-Oxfordshire-Formative-assessment-Project (KMOFAP) that aimed to develop formative assessment practices inside the classroom (Black *et al.*, 2003; Black *et al.*, 2004). From these considerations, in the context of this thesis, I have used both phrases interchangeably, as two key features can be identified in them: the centrality of students learning and assessment integrated into teaching.

Mansell *et al.* (2009), whereby, when trying to clarify terms, stated:

‘What a pupil does or says will be observed and interpreted by the teacher, or other learners, who build on that response to develop a dialogue aimed at helping learners to take their next steps. This is formative assessment which contrasts with summative assessment’

While this last notion is helpful in illustrating that good formative assessment means assessment for learning, it also can be seen how it makes explicit reference to classroom dialogue. This is a sign of the definition of assessment for learning being expressed in a slightly different way to the original, as stated by ARG (2002). Some of these further conceptual elaborations are outlined in the next subsection.



### **2.2.1.1 Formative assessment revisited.**

Definitions of assessment for learning are being reviewed to the extent that researchers and teachers working in collaboration have identified not only the main features of formative assessment practices, but also the tensions that have emerged within its implementation, which in turn has encouraged further theorisation (Black *et al.*, 2004; Black & Wiliam, 2006, 2009, 2012; Hargreaves, 2005; Sadler, 2010; Torrance & Pryor, 2001; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008; Torrance, 2012; Klenowski, 2009; Swaffield, 2011).

Klenowski (2009) argues that ARG's (2002) concept of assessment for learning has been misunderstood, whereby the original principles subverted in classroom practice as well as by some policy-makers. This author reports on the Third International Conference on assessment for learning held in New Zealand, in 2009, whose members devised a position paper that raises a concern on this matter:

... 'deciding where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there', has sometimes been (mis) interpreted as an exhortation to teachers to (summatively) test their students frequently to assess the levels they attain on prescribed national/state scales in order to fix their failings and target the next level'... (Klenowski, 2009:263)

This representation of the concept seems to be instrumental and restricted to monitoring students' performance against a 'pre-determined and tightly sequenced set of learning objectives' (Swaffield, 2011:439). So, to address this diverted use of the term, a 'second -generation' definition was devised, in order to emphasise, with less room for ambiguity, the primary focus of contributing to pupils learning, in the context of day to day classroom activities (Klenowski, 2009):

'Assessment for learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance on-going learning'. (Klenowski, 2009: 264)

The author spells out how this conveys the idea of learners progressively taking

ownership of assessment for learning practices, enacted by their teachers and hereafter, becoming more independent learners. It also suggests conceiving assessment as an enquiry process, where all who are involved actively make sense of the evidence gathered. Consequently, all are enabled to judge and to decide upon the next steps in learning and teaching. In Klenowski's view, this notion of giving students support so they identify what comes next is crucial. This perspective of teachers and students being agents of the assessment process comes across also in the restated conceptualisation of formative assessment by Black & Wiliam (2009: 9):

‘Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instructions that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited’

As pointed out at the starting of this subsection, this ensuing definitional process, responded, in part, to the need to clarify the pivotal features entailed in the assessment for learning approach. This was deemed necessary as understanding of its true underlying principles seemed to have been subverted in practice. In my view, this highlights the need to investigate what teachers really see formative assessment as being and how their conceptualisations shape their pedagogic actions. Their views originate in diverse complex factors, whereby some might have participated in professional development programmes, while others draw on their own accumulated experience to tackle the challenges of implementing assessment for learning in the classroom. Moreover, staff development programmes or other professional formation experiences do not necessarily influence all teachers in the same way in terms of what they think and how they carry out assessment, because beliefs and orientations are not ‘universal among teachers’ (Leung, 2004). It is clear that we cannot take for granted shared assessment and teaching beliefs, for teachers adopt different perspectives from which to implement innovations. In this thesis, the aim is to explore, in the detail, how a group of teachers interpret formative assessment in theory and practice.

### **2.3 Feedback**

What has been progressively accentuated from the discussion in the previous section is that the information gathered through assessment should be reflected upon in order to broaden pupils understanding and modify teaching where this is needed. It has also been highlighted that this is an ongoing process, in the context of classroom work, involving dialogue, observation and completing tasks. Black & Wiliam claim that 'all such work involves some degree of feedback between those taught and the teacher, and this is entailed in the quality of their interactions which is at the heart of pedagogy' (1998:16). For these authors, a key point within formative assessment is with regards to how the information can actually be used as feedback. This section precisely aims to examine approaches to feedback in relation to its link with formative assessment.

### **2.3.1 Sadler's approach to feedback**

Ramaprasad's (1983) early definition of feedback entails three important characteristics. Firstly, feedback might be focused on any system parameter (input-process-output). Secondly, there are three necessary conditions for feedback: the existence of data pertaining to the reference level of the system parameter, data on the actual level and the existence of a mechanism for comparing the data between both levels in order to generate information about the gap between them. Thirdly, this information about the gap only constitutes feedback if it is used to address it.

Drawing on the work of Ramaprasad (1983), Sadler (1989) suggests that in an educational setting, the teacher's role is to communicate the standard, goal or reference level and, beyond that, to encourage student self-assessment. However, these standards could be part of the teacher's tacit knowledge and remain unarticulated. Thus, 'there is a need to get the concepts of quality out of the teacher's head' (Sadler, 1989: 128). This author goes on to assert how aspects of quality are made accessible to students by helping them to come into this understanding. He argues that this is the first condition for feedback to occur and suggests two approaches that could help in externalising what quality would involve in a piece of work. These are referred to descriptive statements to holistically explain key aspects of

quality and the selection of key exemplars. The purpose of this is to illustrate what characterises high quality work and how to make a distinction from work that presents a low standard.

According to Sadler (1989), if the pupils achieve all this understanding during the act of producing a learning task, they would have a better chance of developing their own concept of quality. This, in turn, would lead to the second condition for feedback to be enacted, which the author regards as being the students' capability to make multi-criteria or complex judgments. This demands a consideration of the interrelationship amongst criteria that becomes more relevant than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, even more potential criteria could be brought into play, as necessary, according to the work that is being assessed. The author argues that the many techniques available for making complex judgments can be grouped into two main approaches:

- The analytic approach, where the judgment is broken down through the use of separate criteria. These characteristics are settled by considering the most relevant aspects to the work of most pupils within a particular stage of development of the learning task. The author adds that many teachers implement the practice of providing the students with criteria sheets that contain a set of pre-determined features against which their work will be assessed. He warns about this practice in terms of being problematic for formative purposes and reflects on the extent to which the use of fixed criteria can be adequate for analysing the quality in a piece of work.
- The configurational approach is where the judgment is made first by considering the piece of work as a whole. Then, the author explains, the assessor may justify or substantiate his/her judgment according to separate criteria, which may or not necessarily be included within a pre-established set. Thus, the judgment is holistic and global, and the criteria are not considered in an isolated manner. In this way, the assessment of a piece of work is characterised by some indeterminacy, which according to Sadler, brings a challenge for formative assessment, for as he indicates '...it raises the question of whether students can be expected to make systematic progress

when teachers appear to operate probabilistically...' (1989:133). For this author, it may be the case that teachers try to solve this difficulty by making very clear to students what criteria would be used when they come to appreciate quality in their work, but in doing so, there is a risk that the procedure reverts an analytic approach.

Consequently, exploring quality using complex judgments involves consideration of how to address the work with the criteria regarding which those judgments are drawn. I will return into this issue in subsection 2.3.3. Up until this point, what is important to stress from Sadler's proposal is that, where this second condition of feedback is implemented, it might help in enabling pupils to make comparisons between their actual levels of performance and the required standards.

Moreover, the author contends that a key point in formative assessment relates to the idea of translating feedback into self-monitoring, which he refers to as the third condition of feedback. This is aimed at developing the students' capability of selecting those strategies that are relevant to enhance their work and hence, close the gap between their current performance and the reference level. Sadler (1989) emphasised that selecting moves to alter the gap are not just about correctness or identifying particular deficiencies, such as spelling and punctuation. Instead, they pertain to more complex tasks, where diverse outcomes can be equally considered as good work. That is, there is a range of possibilities to alter the gap and the students should make choices among those available to them. According to Sadler, this can be described as a system that relies on qualitative judgments that people can make, share and agree. Moreover, he advocates that peer and self-assessment can be advantageous strategies in terms of closing the gap and self-monitoring. The author argues that when pupils have the opportunity to discuss pieces of work that arise from the same task they have access to a greater spectrum of solutions and so the repertoire of moves to strengthen their own production can be widened. In addition, having their work commented on by others may help them to remain open to constructive criticism. As a consequence, the possibilities for developing self- assessment skills can be increased, which is of vital importance in terms of formative assessment. As Sadler (1989)

explains, pupils may be less dependent on the teacher's judgments, which might provide more room for learners to be autonomous in their learning.

Sadler's (1989) approach to feedback foregrounds the notion of helping students to understand what quality would involve in a piece of work in order to enable them to monitor this while it is in progress. The author remarks that it is essential that the concept of learning goal, which is initially known by the teacher, must be captured also by the students, thereby providing them with an evaluative experience that will allow them to select strategies for improvement. Hence, within this view of feedback, it becomes crucial to develop student capabilities for self-assessment. Sadler's ideas have inspired further work in investigating how to develop students' such skills when a teacher enacts formative assessment (Black *et al*, 2003) and how to link feedback to the learning goals in an attempt to support pupils in deciding for themselves what their next goals should be (Brookhart, 2001, 2008).

Nevertheless, research has also given rise to other interpretations of Sadler's work. For instance, Hargreaves (2005) notes an emphasis on performance within Sadler's (1989) work. Hargreaves explores how teachers conceptualise assessment for learning and one of the definitions she identified was 'monitoring pupils' performance against targets or objectives' (Hargreaves, 2005:214). She contends that, within this concept, it is the teacher who stills holds the main role in establishing those goals and objectives and relates it to Sadler's perspective. This resonates with Torrance's (2012) characterisation of Sadler's notion concerning closing the gap, which he describes as linear and procedural.

By contrast, Marshall (2004) points out that the essence of Sadler's argument is that there are too many different ways for deciding next steps in learning. She goes even further to argue that a metaphor like: 'the student is heading towards a horizon' (2004:105), may represent more appropriately Sadler's proposal. For Marshall, this notion is implied in the idea of defining quality within a configurational approach, by making complex judgments, which is far from addressing assessment activities towards a fixed goal.

Moreover, Swaffield (2011) has also offered a different perspective by noticing that it is the conditions that help students' performance that are paramount within Sadler's view of formative assessment. This idea, she adds, is also consistent with Sadler's own conceptualisation of learning, which is depicted below:

'Learners can be said to have learned something when three conditions are satisfied. They must be able to do, *on demand*, something they could not do before. They have to be able to do it *independently of particular others*, those others being primarily the teacher and members of a learning group (if any). And they must be able to do it *well*' (Sadler, 2007: 390) (Emphasis in the original)

Sadler (2007) inextricably links feedback with the idea of scaffolding, a term the original meaning of which has been diverted, in practice, into another purpose. He argues that scaffolding has become a very organised, carefully prepared and detailed process of leading the students through all the steps, in order for them to be successful. However, he contends that it was meant to be about giving support while the learning process is carrying on, thus enabling pupils to close the gap between their current levels and where they should be to achieve the learning goal. Thus, he explains, scaffolding should imply a provisional character, and it should gradually come to an end. So, the author accentuates again seeking learners' autonomy in their learning, which would involve pupils internalising the principles to be considered in light of future work. Sadler (2007) refers to this as the recognition process, which is unlikely to be evoked when the teacher leads the questioning and delivers the tasks step-by-step. This means that what needs consideration is not how feedback is provided, but also, how it is understood by students, an issue I address in the next subsection.

### **2.3.2 The students' understanding of feedback**

Sadler's (2010) later work addresses the discussion less from the point of view of how the teachers expect their feedback to be comprehended and more from the pupils' perception and interpretation of that feedback. In my view, these themes were already deliberated upon within Sadler's (1989) early proposal, especially when talking about the third condition of feedback (see subsection 2.3.1). However, it could be said that his subsequent work adds insights in terms of what is involved in the process of

transferring from feedback to self-monitoring, since he identifies a number of difficulties that pupils might have to deal with when trying to connect feedback with their pieces of work (Sadler, 2010). For instance, he explains: the students would have to face some interpretative challenges; they need to understand the concepts and criteria used within the feedback messages; and they have to possess sufficient tacit knowledge that is relevant in order to recognise what are the particular aspects of their work to which a teacher comment might concern. Then, even if these interpretation obstacles are eventually overcome, a fourth difficulty still remains that of incorporating the teacher's feedback into their knowledge base, such that it can be invoked as required in subsequent works. So, the author suggests it is of great importance for pupils to acquire knowledge of pertinent judgmental terms and concepts. These elements are summarised below, taken from Sadler (2010):

- Task Compliance, which alludes to the extent that a sort of response given by a student is coherent with or has addressed the issue required within task specifications. The author indicates that, for instance, if the task requires the writing of a critique, but the student submits an explanation, this does not encompass the form and structure envisaged, and hence, its quality as a critique cannot be judged.
- Quality, according to Sadler, should be defined in the context of complex and non-standardised tasks carried out by students. It is described as an abstract notion that refers to the degree to which a piece of work as a whole comes to fulfil its pursued aim or intention. Consistent with his earlier contribution, the author upholds the view in terms that quality should be determined within a configurational stance, rather than through the sum of its parts by considering them separately (See subsection 2.3.1). He calls for holistic or complex judgments that look at quality as an overall and integrated property, where multiple criteria can be addressed simultaneously in an interrelated way.
- Criteria are conceived as properties or characteristics that can be used to define and signify quality. The author distinguishes between those that are



straightforward and easy to identify, for instance, spelling and punctuation. Other criteria may be more abstract, for example, coherence, which is difficult for students to appreciate unless they become competent users.

In summarising the essential points within Sadler's (2010) perspective, it could be said that if the students develop conceptual understanding of task compliance, quality and criteria their tacit knowledge can be widened. Thus, they will be able to draw on this set of interrelated concepts when making judgments regarding their own work. This implies dealing with an evaluative act like a teacher does by assessing work by looking at quality as a whole and also paying attention to those particular characteristics that deserve to be noticed. All in all, Sadler's (2010) contribution makes it more evident what is key to the process of providing pupils with evaluative experience. They should internalise key assessment concepts (task compliance, quality and criteria), and apply these notions to their actual work and to the work of others. Within this perspective, he gives a foremost role to self- and peer-assessment as a vehicle for students to become independent learners.

### **2.3.3 The interpretation of the criteria**

Drawing on Sadler's ideas, different approaches to communicate criteria from the point of view of the teacher have been explored (See subsection 2.3.1) and some theoretical assumptions regarding their use and interpretation by pupils have been examined (see subsection 2.3.2). Since it is required for students to grasp the reasons for quality and to use that knowledge to judge their work and that of others, the criteria would need particular consideration as one of the relevant issues within feedback and formative assessment.

However, Sadler (2007) notes a discrepancy between the principles of assessment and how the practices have been developed. What he identified as problematic, in particular, is the very limited and restrictive interpretation of criterion-based assessment. That is, the whole learning goal is decomposed into different units, which are subsequently subdivided into smaller ones. In this way, the students' progress is determined by obtaining the results of each step, one at a time. For Sadler, this perspective can jeopardise the goal of assessment, as it would involve an instrumental

use of the criteria. He argues that, the further this segmentation of the whole into different parts goes on, it becomes more for students to understand the interrelationship and dependency amongst criteria. Thus, it might become very hard for pupils to reinstate the sense of the whole and recognise how the sequence of the learning experience is characterised. The author goes even further to state that, consequently, students may acquire an atomised conceptualisation of what knowledge is.

There is also a caveat discussed by Sadler (2007) regarding that seeing the criteria as a collection of components seems more aligned with procedural compliance, which Torrance (2007) calls 'Assessment as learning' to describe an approach where the concern about fixed pre-established criteria practically substitutes learning itself. Torrance (2007) reflects on how much clarity and transparency is needed in assessment procedures and criteria in order to promote understanding throughout formative feedback without these key practices being subverted into extremely detailed tutoring and assistance in order to facilitate achievement, namely, getting students through, but not necessarily through learning.

In light of the above considerations, Sadler (2007) calls the attention to the need to articulate the foundations of the term criteria, reinstating the idea of using them as a framework for devising complex judgments and not as rigid features for describing what is correct or incorrect. This is consistent with the author's (1989) early contribution, when he advocates that, to holistically judge a task or a piece of work, the whole universe of criteria should be conceptually regarded within two subsets, which he denominates as manifest and latent criteria. The former are consciously referred to either during the process of the production of a piece of work, or while it is assessed. The latter remain in the background and they are invoked when some property of the actual piece of work, different from what is expected, emerges. The author notes that, in terms of formative assessment, this would involve to conceiving progression together with the notion of reversibility. This is because latent criteria may need to be communicated explicitly and hence, become manifest, but then they move back to being latent again. Clearly, this author's concepts add insights into the issue of interpretation or appreciation of quality, where flexibility seems to be a core notion

within this process, together with a consideration of the actual task or piece of work being subject to feedback.

From a similar perspective, Marshall (2004), when theorising specifically on how judgments about pupils' writing tasks can be made, suggests that teachers should not be constrained by a list of criteria. She draws on Wiliam's (1998) work to highlight some key points: The first is that, within a formative assessment stance, it is the interpretation of evidence that is essential, rather than only relying on isolated criteria. The second is with regards to the idea of a community of interpreters that come to value a piece of work, which is permeated by the nature of the subject discipline. The third addresses the need for pupils to be actively brought into this community. Potential commonalities can be identified between these arguments and Black & Wiliam's (2006) work, although in a broader sense and within the community of practice perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They hold that teachers are already acculturated with the values and artefacts within the subject matter of a specific discipline and so the task to be accomplished is that of how to introduce students into that sort of knowledge.

#### **2.3.4 The quality of feedback**

Feedback emerged as a core issue in the review by Black & Wiliam (1998). It is aligned with any procedure that has been designed to serve as formative assessment. These authors brought to the fore research examples to illustrate how central feedback can be in promoting students learning, but they also stated that it is not merely about providing it and automatically seeing pupils taking next steps to improve their work. As stated earlier in this chapter, from their review, two main assumptions emerged, these being how the feedback messages are conveyed or communicated by the teacher matters a great deal and how the information provided through feedback is actually interpreted and used by the student is also crucial. This has resonance with Sadler's approach discussed in the previous subsection, where he emphasised that the focus should be on how teachers communicate concepts of quality to their students and how the students themselves grasp this sense of quality so as to be able to analyse their own work, through self- and peer assessment.

It could be said that, from the discussion so far, we have learned that in devising feedback, the road seems not to be straightforward and that some salient issues come into play. It requires shared concepts of what good work implies, to analyse approaches to make judgments, to pay attention to the selection, interpretation and use of the criteria, to settle the foundations for developing students' skills to be able to monitor their own work and decide what comes next. Consequently, as discussed earlier, there are some conditions for feedback to achieve its formative function (Sadler, 1989) and it is not enough just to provide it, for its quality does matter (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Indeed, there has been a large body of research preoccupied with exploring feedback quality and the role that it plays in learning.

Kluger & Denisi's (1996) meta-analysis sought to investigate the effects of feedback interventions on performance. However, their definition of feedback did not consider those areas where it operates without deliberate intervention by an external agent. In an educational setting this implies that the foremost role of the teacher takes precedence over the role of the student. Having said that, these authors' review provides insights that revolve around the need to examine the nature of the feedback processes in order to comprehend the differentiated effects it might produce. In commenting on their contribution, Black & Wiliam (1998) highlight three important notions that these authors found of relevance in the regulation of task performance: the first is that, when feedback suggests pupils pay attention to the ways they are approaching the task, this tends to be more successful than other prompts that are focused towards the self (*e.g.* Good work!). The second pertains that feedback seeming to produce positive effects when it gives information about why pupils' answers are correct, and not limited just to indicating what is correct or incorrect. The third notion they identified relates to the link between feedback and the learning process, whereby any intervention acquires more relevance when the task is ongoing, whereas its effects diminish when the focus is placed on the final product.

Hattie & Timperley (2007) also reviewed literature that captures how differential properties and circumstances of feedback yield distinctive consequences for teaching and learning. These authors conceptualise feedback by spotlighting its meaning and considering it as involving teachers, pupils, peers, parents and even the resources

employed (*i.e.* books, or other materials). They proposed a framework in order to investigate how feedback works, which build on Sadler's (1989) notion of closing the gap between where pupils are and where they should be with reference to the learning goal. They stated that feedback would work well when it answers critical questions, such as: a) *Where Am I going?*, which is influenced on the one hand by the extent that it contains information about the task being done, by drawing on previous pieces of teaching and on the other, by the appropriate level of challenge of the task proposed as well as the specific character of the learning goal. b) *How Am I Going?*, should pertain to providing (by the teacher) or seeking (by the pupils) information about progress and how to proceed. c) *Where to next?*, which should be geared towards expanding learning opportunities and this in turn involves: enhancing challenges, encouraging more self-regulation, and increasing knowledge about the strategies as well as the processes for dealing with tasks. Hattie & Timperley (2007) then devised a model of feedback where these three questions work, in an interrelated manner, at four different levels. They claim that these levels concern to the feedback focus and influence differently how effective it can be. These authors' proposal is summarised below.

- Feedback about the task or product: It stresses whether the piece of work is correct or incorrect, asks for more information and focuses on neatness. It may be helpful for knowing how to complete the task, but it would provide very limited understanding of the underlying principles that are needed to be used in future work.
- Feedback about the processing of the task: This relates to externalising the processes behind the task, which leads to the searching for and the use of task strategies. Thus, it can assist and encourage deeper learning, thereby being more effective than feedback at the task level.
- Feedback about self-regulation: This is with regards to pupils' ability to self-assess their own work which will foster their willingness to strive further with the learning task. It involves students' capacity to develop internal feedback, so they can figure out and hence, decide how to deal with external feedback information. Feedback at this level necessarily impacts on students' self-beliefs as learners and they need to develop confidence that the feedback information

is fruitful, thus making it worthwhile investing more time on the task.

- Feedback about the self as a person: This includes personal feedback. Some examples would be 'Good Girl', 'Great effort' or 'You are a great student', it comprises very little information related to the task and its effectiveness is minimal.

When commenting on the two contributions above, I did not highlight the effect sizes from the meta-analyses assessing the influences of feedback. My study is not aimed at measuring or comparing whether feedback is carried out with more or less effectiveness. Indeed, it is far from this purpose. However, both groups of scholars add insights regarding what would be demanded of teachers when providing feedback to their pupils and it is this perspective I wanted to focus on in the observed lessons. In terms of eliciting whether feedback helps students to improve, it is necessary to pay attention to the content, meaning or focus within its messages.

The first issue to note from the above is that feedback should address specific prompts on the task at hand (task-level), whilst also making suggestions that enable the students to capture the general principles to be applied in future similar tasks (process-level). Brookhart (2001) draws on Ryan et al. (1985) to call this informational feedback, in that it should supply pupils with hints they are able to use for improving their work

The second point to be taken into account is that feedback that addresses the self seems not to be beneficial in that there is no information about how the work might be enhanced and the pupils would not know what to do differently next time. This feedback is characterised as controlling (Brookhart & DeVoge, 1999) or judgmental, leading students to just thinking of themselves as good or bad students (Brookhart, 2001).

A third important matter concerns the need for feedback to reach the self-regulation level pertaining to the student's capacity to understand the goals and to decide on strategies for improvement. The reviews quoted above documented that quality feedback helps pupils to use their metacognitive skills to grasp principles that drive tasks and hence, continue learning. This is a point extensively developed by Sadler

(1989, 2007, 2010) as well as being within the work of Black & Wiliam (1998, 2006, 2009, 2012) and Black et al. (2003, 2004), who advocate the idea of encouraging self-and-peer-assessment as a vehicle for self-monitoring and the development of learner autonomy.

#### **2.3.4.1 Feedback and the regulation of learning processes: Perrenoud's view**

Perrenoud (1998) foregrounds that any attempt to provide effective feedback requires teachers to understand how students might perceive the message conveyed and then, integrate this into their own thought processes. He contends that the delivered message does not always achieve this purpose and often:

‘The messages that teachers conceive as feedback do not in fact play this role for the pupil, because their form, their tone, their content (verbal or non-verbal), the moment chosen, the point reached in the work and the interactive situation in which they occur do not allow the pupils to understand them or to do something with them’ (Perrenoud, 1998: 87).

This author's stance pertains to a view of formative assessment embedded in teaching and suggests that a distinction is required between ‘the regulation of ongoing activities’ and ‘the regulation of learning processes’ (1998: 87) When a teacher designs activities and accomplishes the intended purpose of encouraging particular learning processes among students, this can be conceived of as gaining the students’ engagement in the activity, such that they are able to understand its aim as well as find their own place in relation to it. Achieving this could prevent students abandoning the activity in its early stages. However, Perrenoud (1998) warns this is not synonymous with regulation of the learning process. From his perspective, this involves the regulation of cognitive processes and this can only be achieved when teachers can handle more sophisticated models of mediation to help pupils in what he calls a metacognitive journey. The author adds that such models need to allow teachers entry into the representations and thought processes of the students in order to help them accelerate their: deeper understanding, grasping new insight and/or shaping a notion which can subsequently become practical or operative. Within this process, the purpose of which is to regulate learning, feedback constitutes one tool among many others. He recognises that feedback is ‘neither random, nor marginal’ and should be linked with concepts of teaching and learning in the context of student–teacher

interactions, where the teacher has the role of the initiator or conducts the regulation.

Clearly, again, it can be surmised that, for Perrenoud (1998), assessment is conceived of as inextricably linked to pedagogy. Bearing this in mind, he is concerned that feedback often focuses on remediation, i.e. looking back to what has been done wrong by the majority of the children and then to leading them to correct these points of failure. He argues that this approach is problematic as it leaves students in a passive role and hence, the possibilities to access learning are restricted.

Generally, it seems that Perrenoud (1998) attributes feedback to a different place in the process of formative assessment. This contrasts with Sadler's (1989) approach and with the work by Black & Wiliam (1998) where feedback is given a more central role. However, the alignment between feedback and teaching and learning is recognised as being salient within all these theoretical perspectives. That is, from my understanding, Perrenoud's (1998) concern in terms of helping students' learning in the metacognitive domain, can be seen within Sadler (1989) and Black & Wiliam's (1998) highlighting of the need to foster pupils' capability to take responsibility for their learning. This thesis is not aimed at documenting pupils' mental models in the way that Perrenoud calls for, as it is focused on feedback on the part of the teacher. What this study addresses is the description of feedback instances inside the classroom operating in a two-way teacher-student interaction. This involves exploring complexities inherent to classroom talk and discourse (Black & Wiliam 2006, 2012; Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001) (see section 2.4) and to elucidate the interplay between learning and assessment (James, 2006, 2012) (see section 2.5).

#### **2.3.4.2 Providing feedback and giving grades**

Black & Wiliam's (1998) review focuses on several studies to illustrate that effective feedback in the classroom depends upon a variety of factors, which can determine its quality. One of these contributions refers to the work conducted by Butler (1988). This study was based on an explicit psychological theory that links intrinsic motivation and the kind of assessment expected by students. The experiment included 48 11-year-old Israeli students selected from 12 classes across four schools, with half of those selected being in the top quartile and the other half being in the bottom quartile of their



class. This was in the context of carrying out tests in mathematics and language performance. The students were subdivided into three groups, each of which received a different kind of feedback:

‘for feedback, one third of the group were given individually composed comments on the match, or not, of their work with the criteria which have been explained to all beforehand. A second group was given only grades, derived from the score on the preceding session’s work. The third group was given both grades and comments’ (Black & Wiliam, 1998: 13).

The experiment involved three sessions with two kinds of tasks undertaken in pairs; one task assessed convergent thinking and the other divergent thinking. The results showed that for the group that received comments only, the scores increased by about one third for both types of tasks, between the first and second sessions. Furthermore, these results remained constant for the third session. By contrast, the scores for the group that received comments with grades decreased significantly across the three sessions, particularly for the convergent thinking tasks. Moreover, the scores for the group that received only grades declined on both types of thinking tasks, between the first and the last sessions. Whilst they showed an increase for the convergent thinking task in the second session, this did not persist for the third.

Black & Wiliam (1998) explain that some other tests related to pupils’ interests were applied in this study and showed significant differences between high and low achievers. In addition, they point out that an important lesson can be gleaned from this study’s outcome, whereby while feedback by comments can be very helpful in practice for a student’s task performance, feedback by grades gradually makes their effects weaker.

As noted earlier, Butler’s (1987, 1988) work sought to explore how differentiated feedback affected pupil’s motivational perceptions (i.e. attributions to effort), interest and performance. She found that comments were associated with task-involvement orientation. This is understood as a motivational state, in which an activity is perceived as inherently satisfying, so the student’s main concern would be to develop expertise in relation to what the task asked for, or to improve on previous performance. Consequently, the author adds that success can be attributed to effort, i.e. greater

effort may result in better competence.

On the other hand, grades might trigger an ego-involvement effect (Butler, 1987, 1988), which refers to mainly assessing ability and is perceived of as a stable dimension of individual differences. She adds that, such ability can only be assessed in comparison with others' performance. As a consequence, this property promotes a self-worth orientation, in which the students' main concern would be to demonstrate they are smarter than others.

In the same vein, Brookhart (2008) suggests that feedback within classroom situations should be descriptive and criterion-referenced, providing useful guidance on how to improve the task at hand and also supporting pupils in making sense of the involved processes as well as identifying next goals. To explain this, she uses Tunstall & Gipps's (1996) typology, which distinguishes between 'achievement feedback' that contains a description of what has been done well including the reasons why and 'improvement feedback' that comprises suggestions of what more might be done or what strategies may help in improving the task. By contrast, Brookhart (2008) does not recommend norm-referenced feedback, arguing that it encourages competitiveness, which is especially threatening for low achievers. In this context, she distinguishes, again drawing on Tunstall & Gipps's (1996) classification, positive evaluative feedback (rewards, general praise etc.) and negative evaluative feedback (punishment and general criticism, etc.).

This leads me to return to the earlier discussion (see subsection 2.3.4), where it was made clear that the nature and purpose of feedback greatly matter. That is, the notion that permeates the theories and studies cited so far is that the mere provision of feedback is not enough (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et. al., 2003; Kluger & Denisi, 1996; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Brookhart, 2001, 2008). Across the same writers' work also emerged the idea that where feedback is enhanced, this in turn, can foster the improvement of a student's learning.

What has been also argued elsewhere in the literature is that formative assessment and feedback have at their core the students' involvement in learning and the

development of their self-assessment-skills. This means that research into this phenomenon can offer two different points of entry, on the one hand, the teacher as an important agent in managing feedback as a process within teaching and learning activities, on the other the students' interpretation of the feedback provided (Brookhart,2008). I have chosen to address my study from the teacher's perspective, trying to elucidate their own views on implementing feedback, investigating what are the decisions that drive their actions and probing what it is they are trying to get their students to do in response to their feedback.

From my evolving understanding, feedback on the part of the teachers, can lay the foundations for pupils to develop a sense of quality and be able to use that knowledge to analyse their work. This is to say, during the process, while this capability is being constructed. I believe that feedback is a salient issue as it can be used as a lens to explore other relevant interrelated themes. As can be seen from the work of Sadler (1989, 2007, 2010), when teachers need to externalise concepts of quality a number of intertwined elements come into play, such as devising judgments or focusing on the criteria. Each of these can be addressed with reference to a variety of approaches, which would appear to trigger different consequences and possibilities for students in terms of extending or reducing their understanding. Moreover, exploring feedback practices necessarily demands examination of how questions and tasks are used in the classroom, which pertains to the fine grain of feedback interventions (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Torrance & Pryor 1998)

In sum, this section has helped in shaping the overarching issues that drove my study. I considered it relevant to focus on what aspects of quality of work appear to be important for teachers to signal when providing feedback (see analytical chapters 4 to 7). I have described the different ways in which teachers assist their pupils in the exploration of quality. This study's purpose is to explain teachers' assessment practices by asking them to reflect on their work and to report how they think a formative function is taking place. This endeavour enables access to their concepts, for, as my literature review highlights, to adopt formative assessment proceeding requires understanding of the meanings underpinning such an approach (Sadler, 2007; Black et. al., 2003; Swaffield, 2011).

## **2.4 Teacher-student interaction**

One dimension of the research question that drives my study, as put forward in chapter 1, is focusing on actions and interactions related to feedback, with an emphasis on the ways that the teachers interpret these actions. The preceding section concentrated on a theoretical overview of what is implied by feedback within a formative assessment approach. This section engages in the exploration of some developments of classroom talk and questioning, which permeate the work of classroom assessment.

A range of research studies have contributed to the analysis of teacher-student interaction and the role of language within this process. I begin by singling out Sinclair & Coulthard's (1975) work, which investigates how classroom discourse is structured by categorising teaching exchanges into a triadic sequence of Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF). The authors advocate that, in this structure, Initiation (I) is characterised by an opening move traditionally held by the teacher by the posing of a question when leading a whole class discussion; Response (R) pertains to an answering move on the part of the pupil; and Feedback (F) refers to a follow-up move, by the teacher, which can be evaluative, by accepting an answer as appropriate and commenting on those considered improper. This can also involve extending the sequence by asking for clarification or further ideas and involving other pupils within the sequence. In later work, these authors elaborated upon this wider function and with regards to the occurrence of the third move (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). They explain that when the teacher produces a follow-up that does not consider an evaluation, neither explicit nor implicit, then the class will most likely offer more ideas or replies, even unprompted. They also spotlight that follow-up takes place not only subsequently to a pupil's answering move, for it also occurs after a child's opening move. In Sinclair & Coulthard's view, this is significant as it might constitute an indication of how a teacher values their pupils' unsolicited contributions, in spite of whether she/he continues to exercise the role of closing the exchanges.

Mehan (1979) observes patterns of interaction in classroom and describes a similar basic structure of Initiation–Response–Evaluation (IRE). In his version of this triadic exchange, the teacher initiates the discourse generally by asking a question, the learners then

attempt to provide a response and the teacher makes an evaluative comment of the content of that response. If pupils do not give the answer expected, the initiation act is repeated, until this three-part sequence (IRE) is completed.

Despite some distinctive features in both studies, the teacher role in controlling the discourse is prevalent. In the IRF exchange the possibilities for pupils to expand their understanding are scant (Wolfe & Alexander, 2008). In the IRE pattern of interaction, the opportunities for formative action are reduced, as in practice it involves teachers asking students to mention what is absent from what they have said or from the displayed material and then to intervene until their students reach the correct response (Black & Wiliam, 2012).

Earlier, the relevance of teachers communicating the learning goals and promoting self- assessment by students was highlighted, whereby this fosters pupils' ability to actively engage in learning. This, in turn, was identified as the prime purpose of feedback. Black & Wiliam (2006, 2009, 2012) observe that this approach requires the teachers to endeavour to ask questions and to devise tasks for use in the classroom with the specific aim of creating didactic situations that have at their core the developing of student's understanding. However, they also noted that, during classroom interaction, it is not possible to predict completely what would be the interpretations of what is being heard, said or communicated either by teachers or by pupils. This raises complexities for classroom assessment as teachers and students' actions cannot be separated from the sociocultural and historical contexts in which they are imbued (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Alexander, 2004; Wolfe & Alexander, 2008). Moreover, language and transactions address distinctive purposes, which are a reflection of how societies are organised and conceptualise knowledge (Wolf & Alexander, 2008).

#### **2.4.1 Dialogic Teaching**

Alexander's (2004) international study, which compares classroom discourse in five different countries (UK, France, India, Russia and the United States) identifies the following types of talk:

- rote - drilling of facts ideas and routines;
- recitation - questions designed to elicit recall or work out answers from clues encompassed in the question;
- instruction/exposition - giving information and explaining facts, principles and procedures;
- discussion – exchange of ideas with a view to sharing information and solving problems;
- dialogue – seeking common understanding through questioning and discussion, which guide and prompt, reduce choices, minimise risk and error and expedite ‘handover’ of concepts and principles (2004:33).

Within this oral repertoire of talk, the two latter forms of ‘discussion’ and ‘dialogue’ are considered to have greater cognitive potential (Alexander, 2004; Wolf & Alexander, 2008). In particular, the form of dialogic interaction, as described above, entails pupils sharing ideas through being exposed to alternatives points of view and engaging in cumulative discussion and questioning, both: to develop a common understanding and also to deepen the conceptual understanding of those involved as individuals (Alexander, 2004, 2008; Wolf & Alexander, 2008).

Dialogic teaching relates to a constructivist framework that makes pupils ‘active participants in the teaching-learning processes’ (Wolf & Alexander, 2008:8). From this perspective, they explain, emerges one of the tenets to guide the dynamics of interaction, namely, dialogic teaching should be collective, where teachers and children decide together how they are going to deal with tasks. Then, the authors refer to the principle of reciprocity for quality talk; the extent to which participants listen to each other contributions and build understanding by considering these alternatives perspectives. The authors attribute to this tenet a particular significance in terms of formative assessment in that it characterises dialogue as ‘purposeful questioning’ (2008:8), which means a shift from the teacher’s control of the discourse through initiation moves, towards pupils’ responsive statements. Thus, as they graphically explain, it is the R within the I (R) F exchange that is important. Consequently, how teachers are interpreting their pupils’ answers and being committed to listen what they actually are saying may expand the possibilities for them helping students better

with their learning. This in turn, the authors argue, gives rise to the third tenet for dialogic teaching in that it is supportive, having the aim of encouraging students to articulate ideas freely without being concerned about providing wrong answers and instead, their woven thoughts are geared towards identifying more possibilities for achieving a common understanding (Wolfe & Alexander, 2008).

#### **2.4.2 Exploratory talk**

Mercer (2000) has identified a set of conversational techniques used by teachers in classrooms, which are very similar across different educational cultures. His perspective is that a common thread underpinning them relates to 'building the future in the foundations of the past' (2000: 52). He distinguishes these techniques as: recaps, (reviewing themes or things that occurred in previous experiences in order to settle the scenery for the present task), elicitation (posing questions to pupils to collect information that should have been acquired in preceding classroom activities and that are pertinent for the current or forthcoming tasks), repetition (involving, on the one hand, repeating an answer given by a student, in an affirmative way and aloud, in order to show this is accepted as appropriate, whilst on the other, repeating an answer, but in an inquisitive tone, thus suggesting that it is not accepted as appropriate and the correct response is still expected), reformulation (paraphrasing the pupil's answer in a slightly different way that might make it clearer for the rest of the class, or point to its relevance in relation to the task at hand), exhortation (emphasising the value of previous experiences for the learning success in the current task or activity, whereby the teacher calls upon pupils to remember or think back).

Mercer (2000) claims that a transformation is needed in the culture of classroom talk so that learning has to do with students talking about their ideas, rather than just transmitting knowledge on the subject. He advocates the notions of using language for collective thinking and common understanding and points out that pupils can learn these skills. However, research shows that this is not easily achieved by considering how teachers use questions within classroom interaction (Edwards & Mercer, 1987).

Mercer (2000) identifies three different forms of argument that are used by students when engaging in group work: disputational talk (short exchanges where the participants of the interaction do not want to take on the other's point of view, encouraging competition), cumulative talk (pupils building on each other's contributions, which they do by adding information uncritically in a supportive way), exploratory talk (knowledge and reasoning become visible within exchanges in that arguments are put up for consideration amongst the participants).

According to Mercer (2000), while we can rarely find a unique form of talk within a specific interaction, these different ways of using language are relevant in that they reflect the process of knowledge construction throughout the discourse. This was at the basis of the Thinking Together Project (Dawes, Mercer & Wegerif, 2000; Wegerif, 2001) that examined the development of reasoning within student-student interaction. This endeavour encouraged further initiatives attempting to support teachers in promoting classroom dialogue in such a way that individual and collective reasoning can flourish. It emerged that exploratory talk was the most desirable orientation for educational purposes and trying to convert this into a useful model that might be implemented in a classroom, these researchers proposed seven ground rules for it as follows: (1) all relevant information is shared; (2) the group seeks to reach agreement; (3) the group takes responsibility for decisions; (4) reasons are expected; (5) challenges are acceptable; (6) alternatives are discussed before a decision is taken; and (7) all in the group are encouraged to speak by other group members (Wegerif, 2001; Mercer, 2000; Dawes & Sams, 2005). The evidence supports the view that collaborative talk is helpful in improving co-reasoning, but more work still needs to be done as all these three types of talk also reflect how control operates in a conversation (Mercer, 2000). In Mercer's view, in disputational talk people pursue control, in cumulative talk they do not and in exploratory talk control is constantly the subject of negotiation in that the ideas or contributions offered by the participants may influence how the collective thinking continues, i.e. whether peers are persuaded.

All in all, theoretically, an alignment can be made between formative assessment and dialogic teaching, as proposed by Alexander (2004, 2008) and with formative



assessment and exploratory talk, as described by Mercer (2000). Both insights are significant in shaping my evolving understanding of the many intertwined complexities underlying the process of classroom interaction. So, having to draw attention to how language is used in the development of a child's understanding is inescapable (Mercer, 2000). However, in this thesis the intention is neither to focus on whether discourse can be classified as dialogic or exploratory nor to test the relationship between these categories and assessment. What this study does involve is investigating where, within teacher-student interaction, there is potential for feedback to occur. Questioning, then, has emerged as a relevant issue to be explored. As noted earlier, 'purposeful questioning', with an emphasis on how pupils' responses are interpreted by the teacher constitutes a crucial point where dialogic teaching and formative assessment interact (Alexander, 2008). Likewise, how questioning helps collaborative reasoning and encourages critical reflection constitutes a signal of enhanced learning (Mercer, 2000). This relates to what has been extensively argued in the preceding section in that learners' autonomy is the overarching goal of assessment.

### **2.4.3 Questioning**

It has become increasingly clear from the discussion above that questions can have different purposes and can be very distinctive in nature. Questions might require recall or elicit understanding, they may pursue the probing knowledge or extend pupil discussion (Alexander, 2008; Black et al., 2003). They can be characterised as being open, leading or closed; they also can be open at the beginning, whilst being narrowed at the end, namely, pseudo-questions, in Dillon's (1988) terminology. Thus, questioning emerges as a strategy that should be carefully framed, but this will not be sufficient to encourage further learning, if there is no engagement with the interpretation of the student's response (Alexander 2004, 2008; Black *et. al.*, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2012).

Black et al.'s (2003) report on the findings from the KMOPFAP project, shows the development of question-and-answer in the classroom when supporting teachers in framing and enacting questions that have formative potential. As the authors

point out, this also illustrates a process of teacher change, whereby they reshaped pivotal strategies as a result of a collaborative endeavour (see further description of the project in section 2.6). Specifically, during the initial stages, the teachers orchestrated dialogue at a superficial level with questions closed in nature, asking for recall, fostering pupils to guess some facts or details that the teachers had in mind, seeking terms and descriptions etc. These practices were transformed over time and the participant teachers identified some key points in drafting questions that facilitate thinking and the possible answers they may provoke (Black et al., 2003). A summary of these is provided below.

- Give detailed attention to what a pupil has said and not just accept the answer and then, continuing with another part of the sequence. This creates opportunities for further discussion. As the authors point out, the participant teachers considered it essential to foster pupils comment on their peers' answers.
- Wait more time until hearing a pupil's response helped to engage more of them into the discussion. This can also influence the length of their answers. A strategy that teachers highlighted as beneficial was to encourage brainstorming of ideas between peers or groups, before he/she asked for contributions.
- Spend more time preparing quality questions so to achieve greater student involvement. The focus was not on praising right answers, for wrong answers are more useful as they can be used as a tool for opening up discussion. Devise questions that have at their core the challenge of misunderstanding and the exploration of ambiguity that require addressing before arriving at the correct answer.
- Prepare activities sufficiently rich after questioning so as to provide opportunities for students to expand their understanding.

Thus, paying attention to what pupils say and engineering questions with a focus on developing understanding came across strongly from the participants in the KMOPFAP. The matter of how teachers actually interpret pupils' responses is also brought to the fore by Black & Wiliam (2012), when referring to the teacher's role in dialogical

interaction. While these authors recognise this issue as salient for formative purposes, they also note that research evidence reveals that teachers' use of the traditional IRE format is still common in many classrooms, which contravene formative purposes. In Torrance & Pryor's (1998) earlier study, investigating formative assessment in infant classrooms, it was observed how many complexities arose from the routine of classroom assessment with regards to the role of language and the social context that shape the interactions. Broadly, they reported some assessment incidents that illustrated how ambiguous questioning affected pupils' chances of making sense of what was being asked or how a set of questions focused on cueing or eliciting correct answers ended up with the pupils getting involved in a complex guessing game.

Generally, the contributions commented upon in this section entail significant advances in terms of theory and practice. They help to distinguish the ways in which teacher-student interaction might facilitate a formative assessment approach. They also illustrate how classroom interaction continues to be constrained by a number of factors that give rise to very traditional exchanges, with pupils being relegated to a passive role and with teachers orchestrating the discourse in a variety of ways. This leads me to locate my study within this collective body of research through a holistic stance, but, as noted earlier, with a focus on questioning as one of the critical indicators as to whether they involved promoting or constraining feedback opportunities. Moreover, my aim is to draw attention to how teachers seem to interpret pupils' response so as to achieve an understanding of what is being elicited from children in the interaction.

## **2.5 Formative assessment and models of cognition and learning**

Earlier sections explored some of the salient issues involved within formative assessment, with a view to unpacking its conceptualisation and the implications for classroom assessment. It was brought to the fore that how this approach is interpreted and enacted should be carefully examined, as research has shown some of its key notions have been diverted in practice and seem to be geared towards summative purposes (see subsection 2.2.1.1). In addition, the centrality of students has been highlighted in that formative feedback should help them to identify next steps, not

only by noticing the strengths and weaknesses within their pieces of work, but also, with regards to deciding how it can be improved. Thus, how aspects of quality are communicated by teachers and appropriated by pupils matters a great deal (see subsections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2). The work by Sadler (2007) illustrates how different approaches to defining and using criteria for making judgments can trigger diverse concepts of what knowledge is for children (see subsection 2.3.3). Likewise, the different ways in which classroom discourse and questioning seems to be orchestrated by teachers can be indicative of what is elicited from pupils, i.e. whether the focus is being reduced to remembering facts or greater understanding of what is being discussed is occurring. In addition, questioning can provide some clues on the roles played by students and their teachers within the interaction (see the preceding section). By and large, the emphasis and nuances in the interpretation and enactment of these areas influence whether formative assessment will achieve its original principles.

It could be said that the notion that pervades the gradual unfolding of how formative assessment has been defined by theory, appears to respond to a concern to make more explicit its overarching purpose of helping learners to become more autonomous in their learning and to accentuate its intertwining with teaching. This also suggests that for formative assessment to be effective, a coherent view is required of how learning is conceived (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003; James, 2006, 2012; Swaffield, 2011). However, establishing this alignment does not seem to be an easy task. Indeed, what resonates from the discussion so far is that assessment practices derived from a behaviourist perspective are still common inside the classroom, which as James (2006) points out, comprise: interpreting performance as correct or incorrect; measuring a set of skills in a hierarchical manner; applying by preference tests over other forms of assessment; and providing general feedback to give praise or to reinforce those elements still not achieved by returning to more basic skills, where considered necessary. Consequently, this outlook stresses the need of collecting evidence and informing about next steps, not necessarily with a focus on enhancing learning, but rather, with the specific concern of identifying what is still missing so as to get pupils at the next level (Klenowsky, 2009; Mansell *et al.*, 2009; Sadler, 2007; Swaffield, 2011). This means that next steps are conceptualised as targets or standards and through assessment, pupils are given extra help in order to keep up (Hargreaves,

2005). This notion clearly implies a misrepresentation of the principles that assessment for learning and formative assessment strive for. So, an adjustment is needed between these and other clusters of learning theories with an emphasis on processes rather than products; promoting an active role of pupils within learning and assessment. As James (2006, 2012) and many others contend, the cognitive-constructivist and the socio-cultural, situated and activity theories might provide more room for this alignment to happen. Some of these developments are referred to in the next subsections.

### **2.5.1 Cognitive-constructivist theory of learning**

James (2006, 2012) illustrates the connection between learning and assessment regarding the cognitive-constructivist perspective. She highlights that the advocates of this paradigm contend that people construct meaning and make sense of the world by developing mental models. Under this lens, it follows that a student's capacity to learn new material is influenced by previous knowledge. Learning is achieved when students have understood concepts, the relationship between different ones and have developed an ability to process strategies. Metacognition and self-monitoring become crucial in this process, but the role of a teacher is significant in helping students through organising and structuring knowledge in order to make it useful and retrievable for them. According to James (2006, 2012), this is precisely where formative assessment is a key factor in pedagogic practice, because this can make it possible to elicit students' mental models. Teachers can then scaffold the children's understanding of knowledge structures and provide them with opportunities to apply concepts and strategies in novel situations. Consequently, assessment is an integral part of teaching and pursues the same goal, that of encouraging the student's learning.

### **2.5.2 Socio-cultural theory of learning**

For socio-cultural theories of learning, James (2006, 2012) examines some fundamental principles in order to uncover the implications of this perspective for teaching and assessment. Interpreting Vygotsky's work, she starts from the assumption that learning takes place in interactions between the individual and his/her social environment and refers to the notion of learning as a mediated activity.

In this activity, cultural artifacts play a crucial role, as shown below:

‘Distinctions between tools as a means of labor of mastering nature, and language as a means of social intercourse become dissolved in the general concepts of artifacts or artificial adaptations’ (Vygotsky, 1978:54).

There are physical artifacts, for instance, books or any other didactic materials available to students in a classroom and there are also signs or symbolic tools, such as language. The language has a vital influence regarding the capacity to think, which is developed through social relationships:

‘Language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment. Only subsequently, upon conversation to internal speech, does it come to organize the child’s thought, that is, become an internal mental function’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 89).

This point is reflected in the analysis by James (2012), who notes that the Vygotskian perspective treats learning as a social and collaborative activity in which people develop their thinking together. In this way, what is learned is distributed within the social group, which means that the collective knowledge of the group is internalised by the individual, but at the same time, the individual can also create new knowledge and externalise it through communication. Following this, the others in the group can use this knowledge and then internalise it: ‘Thus knowledge is created and shared in expansive learning cycles’ (James, 2012: 193).

It is generally agreed that Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is of great importance in educational settings. James (2012) argues that this idea contributes to issues of progression, because it challenges the assumption that structures of grades, scales and attainment levels can be reached step-by-step in a linear process. She refers to Grigorenko (1998), who contends that this nonlinearity implies that, in the ZPD, a student could move forward or backward, and to the left or to the right in accordance with their individuality and with their unique profile. Vygotsky (1978: 86–87) points out the following:

‘...The zone of proximal development. It is the distance between the actual

developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers ...a child's actual developmental level defines functions that have already matured, that is, the end product of development...The ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state '.

The focus on maturing functions leads us to pay attention to each child's skills as demonstrated in independent performance. It is also important to consider what the students are able to do with the assistance of others. According to James (2012), two points are important here. First, this implies the possibility of tracing a student's development as a profile within a zone and the opportunity to encourage them to expand and enrich their knowledge. Secondly, it serves to assess how learners respond to support and the introduction of new tools by their peers or teachers.

In terms of formative assessment, Vygotsky's work would demand children taking ownership not only of their own learning, but also of their own assessment, with language as an essential tool that supports them in making sense of new concepts. This is in line with Bruner's (1985) work, who devised a model of negotiated and shared learning imbued within a process of social interaction (Marshall, 2004). Interestingly, has been asserted that both the Zone of Proximal Development together with Bruner's later contribution, can be interpreted as a 'cognitive version of Sadler's gap where progression is understood communally rather than individually' (Marshall, 2004: 109). Thus, assessment might be conceived of as a process of inquiry, where all who are involved actively reflect on the learning process (Hargreaves, 2005). This has resemblance with Sadler's conceptualisation of scaffolding and regarding how to decide next steps in learning (see subsection 2.3.1). It also relates to Sadler's concern about students' interpretation of feedback and their appropriation of the meanings of the success criteria (see subsections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). In sum, formative assessment aims to support pupils in understanding better what to do next in a continuous and exploratory process of negotiation, where self- and peer-assessment arise as being essential (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006, 2009, 2012; Black *et al.*, 2003; Marshall, 2004)

### **2.5.3 Activity theory and situated learning**

A view of learning as an activity mediated by tools and signs was developed by Engestrom (1999). First, this author describes a model of an activity system that depicts the societal and collaborative nature of individual actions. This comprises the subject, which is imbued in a group and the object, which connects individual actions to collective activity and projects them towards the outcome. Each of these is mediated by cultural artifacts that are based on rules, which might or might not be flexible, depending on the division of labour within the community.

The second relevant point included here is related to the expansive cycle of an activity system that embraces the processes of internalisation and externalisation. As Engestrom (1999) explains, the individual can internalise a new activity structure, but this requires reflective analysis of existing knowledge. It also demands the appropriation of existing cultural tools to overcome internal contradictions. However, the author warns that these forms of internalisation do not necessarily ensure the emergence of a new structure. The advancement of the cycles continues and the new model for the activity can prevail:

‘Creative externalization occurs first in the form of discrete individual innovations. As the disruptions and contradictions of the activity become more demanding, internalization increasingly takes the form of the critical self-reflection and externalization, a search for solutions, increases. Externalization reaches its peak when a new model for the activity is designed and implemented’ (Engestrom, 1999: 34)

A possible relation between assessment and a theory based on tool-mediated learning activity implies there could be a wide range of learning outcomes, similar to the socio-cultural theory of learning advanced by Vygotsky. Regarding this, James (2012: 193) lists the following aspects that could be assessed: ‘creativity, higher and lower mental processes; attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural outcomes; individual and shared activity; problem-solving processes and products; and the acquisition of existing knowledge and the creation of new knowledge’.

Another important contribution within the socio-cultural views of learning has been developed by Lave & Wenger (1991), who consider learning as an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice. Within their model, they refer to the learners as



apprentices (newcomers) and to teachers/instructors as masters (old timers). Learning is achieved when learners move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. These authors term the relationship between newcomers and old timers as 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 29). Furthermore, they emphasise that participation, which for them is a central tenet of their learning theory, is based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning. Therefore, 'understanding and experience are in constant interaction' (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 52). From this perspective, learning, transformation and change are mutually constitutive.

Regarding this lens, in terms of formative assessment, it is possible to identify potential commonalities with the literature reviewed earlier. For instance, Black & Wiliam (2012) maintain that when teachers are knowledgeable and experienced with the values and artifacts within a specific subject area, they 'could bring the students into the disciplinary community of practice' (Black & Wiliam, 2012: 221). This, in line with a constructivist view, also resonates with the development of students' capacity for self- and peer-assessment, or with the notion of progressively integrating pupils into the gild knowledge regarding how to work with assessment criteria in order to reflect actively on their own work (Sadler, 1989, 2007, 2010).

#### **2.5.3.1 Formative assessment as a social practice**

In the preceding subsection, there was a shift from the learning perspective that conceives knowledge as the transmission of facts with an emphasis on recall and memorisation, towards distinctive trends in which learning is understood as a process of knowledge construction (James, 2006). Torrance & Pryor (1998, 2001) identify behaviourism as congruent with what they call a convergent approach to assessment, where feedback is mainly associated with correctness and the teacher exerts the foremost role in helping the pupils to accomplish determined tasks. Consequently, the learners' actual engagement is absent such that they are passive agents of the assessment. Moreover, these writers establish a link between constructivism and what they term, divergent assessment, where feedback is exploratory and seeks to encouraging further discussion, rather than being reduced to identifying and correcting wrong answers. Pupils thus acquire a more active role as being not only the recipients,

but also participating jointly with the teacher in the assessment.

Following these author' work, in the next section (2.6) I explore further what is involved in both perspectives, convergent and divergent assessment, in the context of classroom practice. For now, I focus specifically on its link with Pryor & Crossouard's (2008) proposal of formative assessment that takes into account socio-cultural theories of learning. They draw on this body of research to suggest a model that conceives formative assessment as a 'discursive social practice' (2008: 1). They contend that when assessment is carried out inside the classroom, it is enacted in ways that are influenced by the wider socio-cultural context and structures in which it is situated. They refer to Lave & Wenger's (1991) work pertaining to learning being about becoming a different person, so it necessarily involves identity construction. Then, elaborating further on the activity theory system by Engestrom (1999), the authors describe identity as 'multiple and constantly reconstructed' (2008: 10). They argue that formative assessment involves the teacher playing different identities as they may exert varied power relations in the classroom, having pupils responding accordingly.

To explain the movements between the different subject positions the authors use Bernstein's (1996) conceptualisation about framing and classification. According to this, Pryor & Cossouard (2008) assert that framing would allow understanding of the strength of the social rules in the classroom that trigger a pedagogic discourse, which can be instructional and regulative. It is instructional in selecting knowledge to sequence, pace, giving criteria and to control the pedagogic context. It is regulative in establishing hierarchical relations that concern expectations, norms of conduct, character and manner. The second notion - classification - is defined as the strength of the boundaries that separate the categories of discourse. These may refer to subjects (Mathematics, English etc.) or to other categories, which represent the division of labour, for instance, student, support staff, teacher, among others.

Bearing the above in mind, Pryor & Crossouard, (2008) go on to describe the different identity that teachers exert within formative assessment, with diverse rules and division of labour operating between them, which, in turn would imply the accomplishment of convergent or divergent assessment. I summarise these authors' proposal as follows.

- Educator's identity as a teacher: This subject position can strongly frame the setting, for by offering material and using a regulative and instructional discourse, he/she makes explicit the schedule of the structure of the lesson, settles the assessment criteria and introduces the pupils to the rules of the classroom context. In this way, it is exercised as convergent assessment. The authors add that within a strong framing pupils can have opportunities to undertake tasks that help them in devising narratives within the subject discipline. However, it is also needed to open opportunities for peer collaboration with the teacher, a process that would be more readily observed in another sort of educator's identity.
- Educator's identity as an assessor: this places emphasis on providing pupils with understanding of the assessment criteria and thus, taking responsibility for advising when they are not approaching them appropriately. The teacher and students remain in a hierarchical relationship. It encompasses assessment done to the learner and not with the learner, which is convergent in nature. The authors add that, the evaluative language to judge pupils' work encompasses labeling from which can emerge texts that influence a particular student identity. For instance, they often say, 'I am a grade A student'.
- Educator's identity as subject expert: A teacher knows and understands the subject discipline as well as how it is represented in the classroom. She/he recognises its boundaries and makes it available for critique. The pupil responds to this identity as an apprentice, because teachers create the spaces for this to be developed. This would involve, for instance, the negotiation of the assessment criteria in practice. So, they explore in depth and reach an understanding of the meaning of the criteria. The subject expert identity gives in this way more room for divergent assessment.
- Educator's identity as a learner: This subject position is expressed by the teacher criticising aspects of their own work or encouraging pupils to critique it. The power relations are more equal and both teacher and students might work in collaboration. The authors observe that this can influence the shaping of a learners' identity that gives value to peer assessment. However, research they carried out elicited that peer-assessment is not unproblematic demanding

changes of often enduring cultural expectations and students may show some resistance to engaging in those initiatives that result in very unfamiliar practice for them. Pryor & Crossouard align this subject position with divergent assessment, which aims to support indeterminate and prospective learning (2008: 14). To explain this notion, they draw on Engestrom's (2000) distinction between a fixed goal and a zone, then proceeding to quote the definition of the latter as 'the distance or the area between the individually experienced present and collectively generated foreseeable future' (Engestrom, 2000; in Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). The authors locate divergent assessment as building and working in that zone.

Generally, this section, as a whole, has described the link between different learning perspectives and their implications for the ways in which formative assessment is conceptualised. James's (2006, 2012) points out two important assumptions within this interplay. First, formative assessment is not limited to identifying how to get pupils at the next level of attainments with reference to what Swaffield (2011) called prescribed curriculum objectives, in which feedback is relegated as a remedial function (Perrenoud, 1998). Indeed, this resonates with a misunderstanding of the true tenets that drive a formative assessment approach, as argued previously in this chapter (see subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.1.1). The second point is that cognitive-constructivist and socio-cultural approaches imply more complex views of assessment with the learner at the centre of the process and not necessarily driven by fixed goals. This is in line with Klenowski's (2009) perspective in that assessment for learning aims to help in the enhancement of ongoing learning. Thus, to make decisions about next steps for improvement becomes a dialogic process amongst teachers and their students until pupils themselves develop the capacity to judge their own work. That is, formative assessment implies a process of elicitation and interpretation of evidence by all who are involved (Black & Wiliam, 2009) (see subsection 2.2.1.1). Consequently, there is a probabilistic notion that permeates current definitions of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009) as it makes more sense to decide on criteria for quality under a configurational stance (Sadler, 1989) (see subsection 2.3.1), where pupils seek to enhance learning with reference to a horizon (Sadler, 1989; Marshall, 2004; Swaffield,

2011), rather than assessing the quality of their work against delineated objectives. The complexities involved in sociocultural approaches to assessment are also addressed by Pryor & Crossouard (2008), who describe formative assessment as being exercised between different teacher identities moving within a continuum from convergent to divergent assessment. It could be said that, taken together, the sociocultural views of learning sketched out in this section as well as its consequences for formative assessment, demand substantial changes of roles for teachers and students as well as requiring this approach to be defined within a wider framework of pedagogy (Black & Wiliam, 2006, 2012; James, 2006, 2012).

## **2.6 Formative assessment: from research to practice**

A range of studies has been carried out that help to broaden the understanding on how formative assessment may be enacted inside the classroom. In this section, I refer to some of these, which not only shed light on initiatives that help teachers in practical terms, but also have contributed to advancing theory.

### **2.6.1 King's, Medway, Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP)**

In the KMOFAP (Black *et al.*, 2003; 2004), researchers collaborated with a group of secondary teachers with the purpose of putting into practice the findings from previous studies. Drawing on that empirical evidence, a range of initiatives were selected and the principles behind them were discussed. These authors remark that their intention was not to force the adoption of a prescribed recipe by teachers, but rather to the contrary, the role of teachers was to focus on planning for and implementing their own innovations in their classrooms. So, they explored and subsequently transformed ideas about strategies presented in the extant research.

According to Black *et al.* (2003), initially, the participant teachers were encouraged to make changes in four specific areas: questioning, feedback, sharing criteria and self-assessment. From these, they explain, questioning and feedback remained as pivotal areas for teachers and students' engagement in formative assessment, and encompassed verbal discussion as well as teachers' judgments of pupil response to

written feedback. However, as the authors point out, sharing criteria and self-assessment followed a different trajectory as the former was subsumed into several other areas, rather than remaining as a distinct practice. In fact, sharing criteria served the area of feedback as a framework for providing comments and informing pupils on the quality of the task at hand. The set criteria also contributed to self-assessment as a framework that allowed students to make judgments about their own work and plan the next step for improvement. Moreover, the authors also spotlight that self-assessment was addressed, in particular, through the implementation of peer assessment strategies. This within peer-assessment pupils developed the ability to collaborate and hence, supported the building of a picture of what quality would involve in a piece of work.

Another focus of the KMOPFAP was the formative use of summative tests (Black *et al.* (2003, 2004). The intention of this was to encourage teachers to achieve a more positive relationship between formative and summative assessment by using specific strategies. The authors arrived at the conclusion that most of the teachers were able to remove the tension between the two forms in some parts of their schemes of work. However, they also appeared to be constrained by external tests and hence, they wanted to familiarise their students with the same kind of questions that were used within GCE examinations, to mention one example. In sum, their work with schools 'showed a lack of synergy across this internal/external interface' (Black *et al.*, 2003: 56).

The findings from the KMOFAP involved pivotal areas that continued to stimulate research and practice (Classroom questioning; feedback through marking: peer and self-assessment). The authors also reported that the participants in the KMOPFAP had different starting points and they took different routes to enact their ideas of formative assessment, so not all the classroom techniques were stimulus for practices to be transformed in the same way. This project went beyond just developing a set of strategies, as the participants and researchers were also engaged in a process of reflection that focused on the theoretical insights about learning conceptualisations and how teachers might influence the cognitive and affective development of their pupils. That is, not only were the techniques considered important, but also the

reasons behind them. The authors argue that clarification of what really is understood by formative assessment and feedback is crucial, for knowing the original intentions regarding these and acting in accordance with them will be beneficial for students' learning.

### **2.6.2 Learning How to Learn Project (LHTL)**

'Learning How to Learn – In the Classroom, Schools and Networks Project' (James & Pedder, 2006; Pedder & James, 2012) is a large-scale study that involved 40 schools examining how teachers carried out assessment for learning in practice. For the fieldwork, surveys, interviews and classroom observations were the methods adopted for data collection. The researchers measured how teachers valued different dimensions of classroom assessment and compared this with their practices. They reported that:

... 'Teachers tend to place the highest value on 'making learning explicit' and these high values were in line with similarly high levels of reported practice. However, the majority of teachers in the project (about 80%) struggled to bring practice into line with values with regard to 'promoting learning autonomy' and 'performance orientation'. Levels of reported practice for 'promoting learning autonomy' were significantly behind their values whereas levels of practice reported for 'performance orientation' were significantly ahead of their values.' (Pedder & James, 2012: 34)

The authors aver that what happens inside the classroom often seems to run counter to the teachers' intentions and beliefs. This raises issues for an assessment for learning approach, where helping students become independent or autonomous learners, who are able to recognise learning goals, assess their own work and that of others, is at the heart of this. However, it was discovered that the assessment practices tended to be more performance oriented, aimed at trying to get students to meet their targets, as stated in the curriculum. For Pedder & James (2012), the major challenges and complexities concern the classroom environment, where teaching and learning take place as well as the transformation of the roles of teachers and students, which covers not only what they do, but also their conceptions of what is the appropriate role for each in relation to the other.

The next subsection addresses the study by Marshall & Drummond (2006), which reports on evidence from the LHTL project, but focuses specifically on the interview and classroom observation data.

### **2.6.3 The spirit and the letter of assessment for learning**

Marshall and Drummond (2006) investigated how a group of teachers enacted the principles of assessment for learning in the classroom by focusing in detail on the extent to which the promotion of pupil autonomy could be traced in a sequence of tasks implemented by teachers. They examined teachers' beliefs about students' learning to elucidate whether and, if so, how these influence the different ways in which they interpreted their own assessment procedures.

These authors advocate a view of assessment as 'essentially provisional, partial, tentative, exploratory and, inevitably, incomplete' (Drummond, 2003 in Marshall & Drummond, 2006). They argue against the use of a check list of criteria, considering them as being uncontested aspects of quality, which are often difficult for children to understand. Instead, they assert that it is important to consider how pupils engage with tasks that allow them to explore and understand what quality means in a piece of work.

Marshall & Drummond (2006) report that some of the participants in the study used procedures that were intended to be formative in nature, for instance, self-assessment and modelling, but these activities were enacted in other ways. They illustrate this using some examples from the data. I summarise below the elements in these teachers' activities that were identified by these authors as following the letter or the spirit of assessment for learning. The tasks that appear to comply with the letter of assessment for learning are:

- Exchanges focused on correctness. By doing this, the scope of the task is narrowed to being structured according to fixed pre-established elements;
- Issues of quality are not discussed by pupils;
- The exchanges seem to be designed for students to guess what is in the teacher's head. They are framed within an instructional vein and seem to elicit the correct answer, rather than enhancing understanding;
- The judgments are made by focusing on an end product and improvement of attainment.



Tasks that appeared to involve enactment of the spirit of assessment for learning:

- Pupils' engage with basic as well as complex aspects of quality;
- Pupils are encouraged to explore different ways to carry out the same task. They are invited to bring forward their own interpretations about what they need to do. By so doing, there is more chance that they will apply their newly acquired understanding in subsequent tasks with which they engage;
- The exchanges are open and demand further exploration of the pupils' thinking as they are asked to refine their answers;
- The judgments are made by focusing on the process of the task production and what is needed to improve this.

Regarding the teachers' beliefs about learning, the authors unearthed that those observed capturing the spirit of assessment for learning tended to make clear reference to the development of pupil autonomy. These teachers saw the classroom as a place where they could learn from experience in order to refine the learning tasks so as to benefit their pupils' learning. By contrast, those teachers who were tied to the letter of assessment for learning seemed to have a fixed view of children's learning and with this in mind, could not believe that their pupils could improve. They were concerned with clarify everything, in all the different points of the lesson, as they were trying to get the children to do what the teacher expected and hence, they were making the pupils becoming more dependent on them. To explain these participant teachers' beliefs, the authors use Dweck's (2000) distinction between entity and incremental theories of learning. Dweck (2000) maintains that an entity perspective implies a view of children abilities as fixed, which leads to them attributing their success or failure to external factors or to intelligence as a stable property and hence, each task might become a challenge to their self-esteem. By contrast, an incremental stance regards pupils' abilities as dynamics and so they attribute their success or failure to internal causes, like effort and in this way, tasks can become an opportunity for their ability to be enhanced.

Marshall and Drummond (2006) provide a detailed account of the subtle and interesting nuances that differentiate these teachers' expressed beliefs. However, in this subsection I have only addressed the main issues that inform my understanding and

perspectives to take into consideration in light of my own study.

#### **2.6.4 Convergent and divergent formative assessment**

A distinction between two orientations for classroom assessment, convergent and divergent, was addressed in the context of the sociocultural framework for formative assessment (see subsection 2.5.3.1). I referred to Torrance & Pryor's (1998) approach that characterises as convergent a view of assessment aligned with a behaviourist approach to learning and relates divergent assessment with constructivism. In this subsection, I focus on the implications of this author's approach for classroom assessment.

Torrance & Pryor suggest that these approaches should be considered as 'ideal types' and that they are 'not necessarily mutually exclusive' (1998: 153). They treat assessment as a socially constructed process and their observation and analysis of assessment incidents combine insights from a number of psychological and sociological standpoints. Likewise, they describe a range of possibilities in terms of pedagogic strategies that teachers can use in the classroom in order to enact formative assessment. They have devised categories to represent this process, including: observing, questioning/eliciting, metacognitive questioning, task criteria, quality criteria, critique, correcting and planning, amongst others. The authors explain that some of these processes are likely to incline towards convergent assessment, while others, may be identified as divergent and even within these, teachers can move between both forms. As they point out, the intended purpose behind any pedagogic strategy and the possible effects it might have on children can vary in different contexts.

As presented in figure 2.1 (from Torrance & Pryor, 2001: 617), each of these approaches offers distinct practical implications with regard: how planning is addressed, the methods of recording, how the interaction of the child with the curriculum is analysed, the sort of questions and tasks employed, the focus of the assessment, the kinds of judgments made, and; the degree of the learner's involvement.

Convergent Assessment	Divergent Assessment
<p>Assessment which aims to discover <b>if</b> the learner knows, understands or can do a predetermined thing. This is characterised by:</p> <p><b>Practical implications:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. precise planning and an intention to stick to it;</li> <li>b. tick list and can-do statements;</li> <li>c. an analysis of the interaction of the learner and the curriculum from the point of view of the curriculum;</li> <li>d. closed questioning and tasks;</li> <li>e. a focus on contrasting errors with correct responses;</li> <li>f. judgemental or quantitative evaluation;</li> <li>g. involvement of students as recipients of assessments.</li> </ul> <p><b>Theoretical implications:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h. a behaviourist view of learning;</li> <li>i. an intention to teach or assess the next predetermined thing in a linear progression;</li> <li>j. a view of assessment as being accomplished by the teacher.</li> </ul> <p>This view of assessment might be seen less as formative assessment, rather as repeated summative or continuous assessment</p>	<p>Assessment which aims to discover <b>what</b> the learner knows, understands or can do. This is characterised by:</p> <p><b>Practical implications:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. flexible planning or complex planning, which incorporates alternatives;</li> <li>b. open forms of recordings (narrative, quotations etc.);</li> <li>c. an analysis of the interaction of the learner and the curriculum from the point of view both of the learner and of the curriculum;</li> <li>d. open questioning and tasks;</li> <li>e. a focus on miscues - aspects of the learner's work that yield insights into their current understanding and on prompting metacognition;</li> <li>f. descriptive rather than purely judgemental evaluation;</li> <li>g. involvement of the student as initiator of assessments as well as the recipient.</li> </ul> <p><b>Theoretical implications:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h. a social constructivist view of learning;</li> <li>i. an intention to teach in the zone of proximal development;</li> <li>j. a view of assessment as accomplished jointly by the teacher and the student.</li> </ul> <p>This view of assessment could be said to attend more closely to contemporary theories of learning and accept the complexity of formative assessment.</p>

*Figure 2.1 Convergent and divergent classroom assessment (from Torrance & Pryor, 2001: 617)*

The authors' proposal illustrates the complexities involved in any attempt to implement formative assessment as well as in providing a theoretical basis for teachers to use to analyse their own practices and thus, identify possibilities for fostering formative action. Regarding this, the authors conducted the 'Primary Response Project' (Torrance & Pryor, 2001) in which they engaged with primary teachers in collaborative action research and reported on changes in classroom practices. These also generated insights to inform and modify theory that hence, complemented and built upon their earlier studies, as follows.

- When investigating assessment incidents in infant school classroom, a distinction was observed between task criteria and quality criteria. The first addresses communicating goals and criteria 'to ensure the work is on target' (1998: 164), whilst the second pertains to the 'enhancement of quality of future work and the promotion of greater independence' (1998: 164). Both elements can be negotiated with pupils and the key differences lie in the intentionality behind them.
- In the Primary Response Project, the teachers located the clarification of criteria at the centre of classroom assessment practices. That, both task and quality criteria were addressed within a dialogic and dynamic process: 'through the interaction of questioning, observation and feedback' (Torrance & Pryor, 2001: 623).

These research outcomes demonstrate that all of these elements should be integrated into a holistic framework. For its practical development, teachers need to remain aware of the social and problematic nature of classroom interaction. The authors suggest that different sorts of questions need to be developed in order to encourage pupil involvement in discussion. They also spotlight observation as a process that can yield formative information that makes questioning and feedback more purposeful. Moreover, the feedback should be oriented towards collecting evidence about how the task is being completed as well as how quality can be improved. Torrance & Pryor (2001) also report on the process of the teachers' reflection on their practices and

highlight the relevance of this for developing formative assessment. They describe how convergent and divergent assessment as abstract concepts helped the teachers in conceptualising their own approaches to assessment.

The findings and insights gained from reviewing these research endeavours are relevant in shaping my evolving understanding on the main topic of my own study. They serve to highlight the many intertwined elements that require consideration when investigating formative assessment. These elements include: feedback, criteria, questioning, peer-and-self-assessment, the social construction of classroom talk, teachers' beliefs about how students learn and significantly, the awareness that innovations that are intended to promote formative action do not necessarily achieve their purpose. That is, they might fail to keep within its spirit (Marshall & Drummond, 2006) or might actually be enacted as convergent assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001). All these areas (communicating criteria, questioning, feedback, peer and self-assessment) were approached and structured differently by the teacher participants in the various different projects previously commented upon, but were all aligned with the shared purpose, that of helping students to improve their learning. Thus, they are all identified as relevant in their potential to serve a formative function.

What has become increasingly evident from the literature reviewed within this chapter, as a whole, is that there is a need to revisit not only the practices, but also the original foundations underpinning formative assessment (Sadler, 2007, 2010; Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2006, 2012; Elwood, 2006; Klenowski, 2009; Mansell et al., 2009; Swaffield, 2011). Torrance & Pryor (1998) examine classroom assessment in a continuum from a convergent to divergent perspective, whilst Hargreaves (2005) suggests that assessment of learning and for learning should be considered as two extremes of a spectrum, from a viewpoint of knowledge as external and fixed at one end and at the other it being co-constructed by the learner. Elwood (2006) points out that to understand assessment practices along the continuum from summative to formative, the learning theories that are associated with each are required. Otherwise, it would be difficult to comprehend and to identify those occasions where formative assessment does not work (ibid).

Finally, the aim of this study is to explore the main issues that emerged from my revision of the literature by focusing on actions and interactions related to feedback so as to reach an understanding of how the participants interpret these actions. That is, the purpose is to access the learning conceptions that underpin their formative assessment practices.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study investigates teachers' interpretations of feedback in terms of theory and practice and examines how this might be informed by their conceptions of learning in the context of primary literacy lessons. The project involved an exploration of the key issues, regarding formative assessment, raised by the Literature review, which led to the following research question:

- *How do teachers interpret feedback from a theoretical and practical standpoint in relation to their teaching and their students' learning?*

As explained earlier (see chapter 1; General overview), this primary inquiry took into account a set of sub-questions that addressed the research focus on the subject matter of interest by having access to teachers' actions and interpretations in the interplay that took place between teaching, learning and assessment:

- *What are the teachers' feedback practices and the underlying principles that guide them in the actual conducting of classroom interaction and through pupils written assignments?*
- *What are the notions that teachers recognise as salient within a formative assessment approach and how do they explain their meanings?*
- *How much do assumptions about learning underpin teachers' feedback practices?*

Broadly, the research project encompassed three participant teachers of Year 5 classes and one of a Year 4 class from three different primary schools in London. The data were gathered through classroom observations and interviewing the teachers. The focal lessons were centred on teacher feedback related to language and literacy issues and were observed during the period October 2013 to March 2014. Follow-up

interviews held with the teachers were carried out in order to ask them about specific instances within classroom episodes. A semi-structured format was adopted for the interviews so as to explore the teachers' interpretations and intentions in the feedback process with reference to pupils' written assignments.

In this chapter the research methodology adopted for this inquiry is described. It begins by characterising the study within a qualitative paradigm. Following this, an outline of the general context where the empirical work took place is provided. Next, the choice of the participants is explained and the rationale underlying the methods employed for collecting and analysing the data. Then, a description of the analytical approaches that I have applied in conducting this research is provided. The chapter is concluded by discussing the ethical considerations that needed to be taken into account during the research process.

### **3.2 A qualitative paradigm**

The literature review foregrounded that formative assessment is a complex phenomenon with a range of interconnected issues, which teachers seem to approach and valued in diverse ways. Teacher-student interaction is considered salient in that it can inform us on the emphasis and nuances that characterise how formative assessment is orchestrated in a day to day basis. Moreover, the literature review also highlighted the need to take into consideration how teachers conceive pupils should learn and the ways in which this might interact with assessment.

Bearing the above in mind, my research involved a focus on practices, interpretations and processes being carried out as well as addressing participant reflections in these respects. Berg & Lune suggest that 'data gathering ... [is] intricately associated with the motivation for choosing a given subject, the conduct of the study and ultimately the analysis' (2012:5). From a similar perspective, Silverman (2011) points out that when selecting amongst the different research methods consistency is needed with respect to what is actually being sought within the research. I was interested in understanding the teachers' views on feedback and formative assessment in the settings being examined, their own classrooms. I sought to have access to their own interpretations



and meanings attributed to the assessment practices that were enacted. These can be seen as substantial elements that are common to qualitative research (Mason, 2002). This was a small-scale study that addressed how a group of participant teachers see themselves dealing with the object of the study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). What is shared in this thesis is 'the understanding and perceptions of others' (Bruce & Lune, 2012:8), as I attempted to have access to the assumptions that drove their actions when conducting formative assessment. Qualitative research pursuits aim to provide 'contextual understanding on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data' (Mason, 2002:3). The research developments discussed in chapter 2 (see section 2.6) illustrated that there was a range of areas to take into consideration for assessment to achieve its formative purpose, i.e. the students learning. It also showed different pathways that teachers took in implementing related innovations to enact this purpose in classrooms (Black et al. 2003). Moreover, the need to investigate formative assessment within a continuum from convergent to divergent was emphasised (Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001). Furthermore, assessment for learning can be accomplished following the letter or procedures at surface level instead of enacting its spirit (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). At the basis of my research question was the idea of capturing the contradictions, richness, and meanings arising out of teacher-student encounters that concerned feedback within a formative assessment perspective, which also characterised the study within a qualitative paradigm (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2011).

### **3.3 General Context**

The contextual information that I provide in the following subsections concerns the three schools where the research was undertaken. Purposively, the local authority has not been named and the name of the schools and the teachers has been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

The three chosen schools were part of two different local authorities: St. Andrew's and St. Albert's Primary School belonging to the same local authority in north London, whilst St. Thomas pertains to a local authority in an area of west London.

Regarding the former schools, both were located in areas of great ethnic diversity, with only 40% of the population being white British. This was reflected in the schools where an important part of the pupils spoke English as a second language. Both schools draw pupils from the same area, whose families' socioeconomic status was middle class or lower middle class. However, they had particular differences that were relevant in the context of the research as will be described below. (See subsections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2).

The local authority governing St. Thomas school was not as diverse ethnically or culturally, but it still had a significant number of people in the community being from minority groups. The particular area that surrounded this school was not wealthy, but would not be classified as being of low socioeconomic status.

### **3.3.1 St. Andrew's Primary School**

St. Andrew's is a community mixed primary and nursery school that has about 500 pupils aged between 3 and 11 years old, of which about 50% have English as an additional language. The proportion of students that are entitled to free-schools meals is about 35%, which according to the last OFSTED report (2013) is above the national average.

Sophie, the Year 5 participant teacher had taught in the school for the most of her 18 years of professional career. She described the school surrounded by a particular area that had high levels of adult illiteracy. There were a number of parents of schoolchildren, although not in her class, who were not able to read and write as well as a high proportion of them who did not speak English as their first language. This meant for Sophie that their difficulties could be transferred to their children. So, many parents were not seen as being supportive of their children's learning, thus making homework a problematic issue:

*... 'they can't help their children at home and we have found that those children whose parents can't help at home are really disadvantaged at school...and if there's no value in education at home, then the children see it has no value, so it affects the way that they work within school'(Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School.Int-3:1)*

She described her Y5 class of 27 pupils, as multicultural with 50% of the children whose first language was not English. However, when interviewed on March 2014, she indicated ... *'by considering their backgrounds, they do quite well'*... She felt confident about the support that the school could provide in learning and referred to the notion of adapting the curriculum to the needs of different children.

During my observation period that lasted from October 2013 to March 2014, I was able to witness how the class was distributed into different table groups, depending on their different ability levels... *'all the children in my class know what level they are at – they all know the groups that they are in, they know the order of the groups (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School.Int-3:1)*. Hence, the children seemed used to working in this way as well as regarding the presence of two other adults in the room (teaching assistant and the teacher helping with special needs).

### **3.3.2 St. Albert's Primary School**

St Albert's is a Church of England School that has about 250 children aged between 4 and 11 years old. Nearly 17% have English as an additional language and those with special needs amount to around 16%. The proportion of students that are entitled to free-schools meals is about 10%, which according to the last OFSTED report (2013) is below the national average. Steve, the Y5 participant teacher, had been teaching at the school for a few years and during the period of data collection, he also had a position within the leadership team. In his third interview, he indicated that the pupils come from a range of cultural backgrounds and at the same time the school is very local as the majority of parents attend the church down the road. They also have pupils of different religions, although a very small number.

Steve had the impression that parents were committed to the school, ...*'I would say, in my experience, a very supportive set up. I love our parents, they're great, yes, very supportive in general'*... (Steve, St Albert's school. Int-3:2). He gave a detail description of some online programmes they had available for English and Maths through which parents could help pupils at home. In some cases, such as children with special reading needs, he personally emailed different material to their parents.

When talking about his Y5 class of 32 students he said: ... 'they were really tough the first few weeks I had them'... (Steve, St Albert's School. Int-3: 9), but during the process of my data collection, the behaviour issues seemed to have been sorted out. Moreover, throughout Steve's interviews there was evidence that he perceived his class as very capable children, which encouraged him as a teacher to implement innovations:

*Absolutely... and realising – not being afraid to take risks because I've not done this before ...and it is knowing that for me with this class, I can learn as much from them as they can from me... (Steve, St Albert's School. Int-1:7)*

The lessons observed were within the period that lasted from November 2013 to March 2014. The class was organised into mixed ability groups, whose members would rotate depending on the nature of the activity. My impression as an observer was that pupils were used to this dynamic of work.

### **3.3.3 St. Thomas's Primary School**

St Thomas is a catholic school that has about 270 pupils aged 3-11 years old. The number of students who speak English as an additional language is well above average, as is the case regarding the proportion of students that are entitled to free-schools meals. In addition, the school has nine pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs. Two of the participating teachers of this study worked at this school: Carolyn Y5-Class-teacher and Lily Year-4-Class-teacher.

Carolyn had been at this school for three years, first as a teaching assistant and then she undertook the graduate teacher programme for teaching year six. During my research period, she was in her NQT year and so this was her first year teaching her own class, which was year five. When interviewed, on March 2014, she broadly described her class indicating that it could be seen as a reflection of the school's multicultural background.

*... So we have got some Philippino, Polish, Spanish, Portuguese... lots of different countries and some English. It is quite nice in way, because the whole school is like that... (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:1).*

The participating Y4 teacher, Lily, was also in her NQT and she referred to her class as committed to learning, without any serious behaviour issues. However, what seemed to be a challenge for her was to teach children for whom English was not their first language, as it limited the possibilities for learning:

*... 'The trouble I have really is because for a lot of them, they don't speak English at home, they don't have English role models at home and it comes across in their work, their literacy work. It comes across in their writing and their speaking and often their understanding as well, which can travel across all areas'... (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:1).*

During classroom observation (November 2013 to March-2014), both the Y4 and Y5 classes disposed the classroom, in some occasions, by arranging pupils within ability grouped tables, which had been previously determined according to school planned summative assessments. This, when group work was put in practice. During whole class teaching Lily maintained this arrangement, whereas Carolyn modified it by placing the tables in columns with the pupils looking towards the front of the room. Moreover, a general distinction to be made is that in Y5 the exposition of the contents of the discipline took precedence over extended discussion, which appeared to me to be the reverse in the classroom context for Y 4.

This research involved investigating the interpretations that teachers gave to feedback in an attempt to portray this phenomenon in depth, which meant trying to understand what teachers or individuals said about it in their own terms. To accomplish the empirical work, within this outlook, it was relevant to look for schools that offered distinctive sociocultural context as well as participants with diverse teaching experience.

### **3.4 Participants**

In the preceding section the schools where the empirical work was carried out were described. I wanted to work with schools with children that might represent a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, in order to achieve a genuine description of how

formative assessment was enacted, throughout an analysis that could bring out the particularities in the actual conduct of primary classrooms that were busy and diverse.

My understanding was primary education in England has a very long tradition of a child centred learning approach. This was a lens itself to my study because I really wanted to comprehend how teachers come to grasp the concepts of formative assessment. I thought that if the teachers were kind who were prepared to do everything they could to assist the students' learning, then the ideas underpinning formative assessment might play out more fully in such a context, thereby allowing me as a researcher to understand the processes involved better.

In accordance with this perspective, the teachers were selected on the basis of their having declared an interest in implementing feedback as a strategy for formative assessment. It was also a criterion to choose participants with different teaching experience and backgrounds. In addition to this, it was deemed that only those teaching Y5 or Y4 classes would be included in the research. This is because, these schools years, most likely, may have been less influenced by the external accountability purposes of assessment.

Accordingly, the sampling was purposive, within a qualitative stance (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Simons, 2009; Mason, 2002). It was strategic or theoretical in nature, for it aimed to sum up variety in relation to a wider universe, but did not involve pursuing representativeness (Mason 2002).

It should be noted that while I sought schools or individual teachers who shared the desire of carrying out assessment for learning, I still expected they allow me to have access to a diversity of feedback practices and interpretations. As Berg & Lune contend that 'all the aspects of an individual's social life are interconnected and often one of them cannot be adequately understood without consideration of the others' (2012: 331). Drawing on this idea, I considered the schools as real contexts, which might have influenced the way feedback practices were perceived by teachers. In addition, using different contexts could provide an invaluable wealth of data to inform the study. Consequently, it was deemed worthwhile to investigate different settings in order to

capture complexity and to seek a better understanding of the feedback in each. The intention was not, however, to gauge whether different groups of teachers or schools were doing something right or wrong (Berg & Lune 2012). None of the participants within these three schools withdrew from the research and in the table below an overview concerning this is provided; reiterating that all the names have been changed in order to protect their identities.

Participant teachers	Schools
Sophie	St. Andrew's Primary School
Steve	St. Albert's Primary School
Carolyn	St Thomas's Primary School
Lily	St Thomas's Primary School

*Table 3.1 Overview of the participant teachers*

### **3.5 Methods of data collection**

As stated earlier, this research was focused on the feedback practices in everyday contexts and the interpretations of their meanings held by a group of teachers. These are some features commonly used by ethnographers (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007), although my intention for this study was not to conduct a full ethnography; I expected to capture how and why teachers use feedback in their formative assessment practices to explain the complexity of this situation. So, it was not the details of what was happening in the classroom scenario that was important, but rather, what teachers notice along with how they respond and make pedagogic choices. Classroom observations and participant interviews were selected as methods for gathering information consistent with addressing the main research question of the study.

#### **3.5.1 Classroom observation**

The data collection phase probed teachers' actions in ordinary classroom settings, i.e. exploring naturally occurring events (Mason, 2002; Simons, 2009; Silverman, 2011; Cohen & Manion, 2011). Observation has the aim of gaining a comprehensive picture of the site and a sense of the setting, which cannot be obtained by the sole use of other means, such as interviewing (Simons, 2009). Capturing data first-hand, through

observation gave me the chance to discuss feedback events with the teachers in more detail. Moreover, it could be the case that when people consider something meaningful and important, they find it difficult to put their feelings into words (Weinberg, 2002). Even when teachers find discussing their practices straightforward, they might not necessarily be aware of every detail. This consideration was relevant in the context of this study, because the participants could forget important actions related to feedback due to the classrooms being very busy. Consequently, classroom observation was deemed crucial in order to capture the nuances that potentially would not be verbalised by the teachers during interview (Mason, 2002).

### **3.5.1.1 What to observe**

The observation process aimed to document incidents or events in which feedback could have potentially occurred. In the context of this study, an event was understood as a theoretical construct or a heuristic deployed to investigate how people can create meaning when they are acting and reacting to each other (Bloom et al., 2005, 2009). As these authors explain, this means that, within this process of interaction people can place different emphases and meanings on what they are doing. An event can be considered as empirical spaces used to infer practices or to understand how the actors involved are making sense of this social encounter.

Bloom and his colleagues develop their work with a focus on literacy events. Their concept can be clearly related to the broad field of classroom discourse and the selection of events as units of analysis. This has been applied in research design and/or as a means of disseminating findings in the specific area of assessment (Torrance & Prior; 1998, 2001; Black et al., 2003; Marshall & Drummond, 2006). I explored feedback events, which were selected according to my research focus (Mason, 2002) (see section 3.1...), namely, illustrating salient elements or instances that were critical (Wragg, 1999) to the enactment of formative assessment or that offered an opportunity for documenting different ways in which feedback supported the pupils in the exploration of quality, taking into consideration the intertwined areas that were implied.



To collect observation evidence, audio-recording was carried out with permission from the teachers, which provided me a useful check on the accuracy of my understanding (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I utilised an unobtrusive recording device and strove hard to maintain my role within the setting as a passive observer (Silverman, 2011). However, as a researcher one may not be able to control how one's presence is perceived by the participant teachers or students.

The period of observation lasted roughly six months. The number of lessons observed in each of the four participant teachers' classes is presented in the table below. The rounds of data collection depended, on the one hand, upon when access was granted within each school. On the other, they were determined by my evolving understanding of what the data were informing me with regards to formative assessment. This pertained to transcribing extracts, comparing my initial perspectives with subsequent observations, and insights gained from teachers' interviews over the course of the study.

	School	Lesson observed	Observation Period
Sophie-Class Teacher	St. Andrew's Primary School	10	01.10.13 - 04.04.14
Steve -Class Teacher	St. Albert's Primary School	9	06.11.13 - 19.03.14
Carolyn-ClassTeacher	St Thomas's Primary School	8	04.11.13 - 03.03.14
Lily -Class Teacher	St Thomas's Primary School	7	04.11.13 - 17.03.14

*Table 3.2: Overview of the participant teachers and the period of data collection*

### **3.5.2 Interviewing**

My research question demanded an immersion into the participant's reflective processes, trying to gain access to the meanings they ascribed to their experiences within formative assessment. I examined different forms of interview that seemed to

be in line with this purpose: in-depth interview (Miller & Glassner, 2011) and active interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein, 2011). Whilst they present some differences in the degree of engagement between the participant and the researcher, both forms share a number of elements: the view of knowledge generated through an interview as being socially constructed; the notion that the captured understandings should be linked and are part of the context; and that the knowledge generated covers the various insights prompted by those involved. The ideas interact together within an approach that considers interviews as conversations, as advocated by Kvale & Brinkmann, (2009:2-3):

‘The research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an *inter-view*, where knowledge is constructed in the *inter-action* between the interviewer and the interviewee. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest’

Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2009) perspective suggests that a qualitative interviewer should concentrate on the nuanced descriptions that portray qualitative diversity and highlight differences, rather than fixed categorisations. These authors also contend that finding out why participants experience and act as they do should be a central purpose. Moreover, they acknowledge that interviewees’ answers may be ambiguous and provide apparently contradictory statements. If this occurs, the interviewer has the responsibility of clarifying the information given or determining whether this is due to a failure of communication during the interaction.

Following the above considerations, I adopted Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2009) approach to conduct my interviews within this study. Follow-up interviews were carried out seeking to enrich and to extend the understanding of feedback events observed during the lessons. A semi-structured format was adopted for the interviews so as to explore the teachers’ interpretations and intentions in the feedback process with reference to pupils’ written assignments. The intention was to have a flexible structure that allowed for the development of unexpected themes. In the words of Kvale & Brinkmann (2009:27) ‘it is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire’.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Defining a strategy for analysing data entails thinking about how to link the process of collecting, organising and/or sorting the data as well as the method of analysis itself (Mason, 2002; Yin, 2009; Silverman, 2011; Berg & Lune 2012).

#### 3.6.1 Identifying episodes

In the first stage of the analysis, the aim was to gain an overview of the lessons as a whole, I listened the audio recordings and played them back as necessary as well as looking at the data previously transcribed. For this stage, I drew on the work of Bloom et al. (2005) to subdivide the lessons into phases. The phases were determined by identifying those signals that the participants used to mark the boundaries that guided the interaction. Likewise, the main focus to distinguish one phase from another was what seemed to be its purpose, according with the teachers' intentions or expressions. I think that identifying all the segments on that basis helped me along the road when interrogating my data. To mention one example, every time when the teachers tried to get the students to think, talk or discuss the content of the lesson, I named it as a *Discussion-Content phase*. By so doing, before I went on to further analysis, I was able to look at segments within different phases and to have a first insight into which were more or less likely to have involved some sort of formative interaction.

With the above considerations, the following lesson phases were established across all the observed lessons corresponding to every participant teacher. (See also Appendix 1: Overview of kind of lesson phases)

- Business: Registration time, attendance, early morning work (time allocated for students respond to the teacher marking)
- Introduction: The teacher mainly explains what the learning task is for the current lesson. If the main activity is related to earlier lessons or carries on with what has been previously encountered, the teacher summarises earlier points and establishes the stages for students' work onwards.

- Discussion content: The teacher is trying to get the students to think, talk, discuss or work on the lesson content. A variety of activities can be carried out within this phase and the organisational context is also diverse. For instance, whole class teaching, collective or collaborative group work.
- Writing: The teacher sets the instructions for writing and an example of a piece of writing is discussed and shown on the whiteboard; time is allocated for writing during the lesson.
- Revision work: The teacher provides verbal comments on the students' work. It takes different forms: individual pupils are asked to read aloud pieces of writing, or groups of children give an oral presentation on their work.

In a second stage of the analysis, I paid attention to the identified phases within lessons. To perform this task, I organised the main elements involved within each phase. Firstly, I indicated its specific purpose depending on the singularities of every lesson. Next, I established in which organisational context the interactions were structured. When doing this, I drew on Alexander's work (2008) and I found that some phases relied on *whole-class teaching*, which pertain to the teacher and her/his class taking part of the dialogue. Whilst other parts were organised around *Collective group-work*, where pupils worked together, but still the teachers led the interchanges. The pupils also undertook *collaborative group-work*, which is characterised by this author as an opportunity for pupils to drive the discussion. This stage was concluded by identifying data segments within each lesson phase. (See as an example appendix 2: Overview of classroom episodes within kinds of lesson phases).

The closer examination of each phase allowed me to recognise what part within the wider context of a lesson appeared to have more potential for feedback to have taken place. I came to realise that the discussion content, writing and revision work phases, in the organisational context of whole class teaching, offered more possibilities or instances where feedback could be more explicit. Hence, I focused on capturing and analysing those data in more detail. My next step was to look at these instances across lessons in order to decide on some examples to subject to deeper analysis.

### **3.6.2 The choice of the episodes**

The third stage of the analysis was to identify and concentrate on those events that had potential for feedback to emerge. I have labelled these classroom episodes, as they were investigated in their educational sites. In what follows I outline the considerations taken when selecting episodes that were subject of finer analysis.

The overarching purpose was to focus on those instances within teacher-student interactions that offered opportunities for pupils to explore what quality meant in relation to the topic or piece of work being discussed. Drawing on Sadler's (1989, 2007, 2010) work, I identified the different ways or practices through which teachers attempted to make accessible those aspects of quality to their students. My research question involved addressing how formative assessment was being enacted in classroom, thus I was concerned that the episodes were illustrative of a range of teacher actions related to this. Moreover, I wanted to provide a picture that was as authentic as possible. So, while the episodes were intended to provide feedback, they could also exemplify the intertwined issues and complexities that were being played out in real settings. That is, it was not enough to interrogate my data by trying to elucidate the purpose and content of feedback within sequences of interaction, for the interest also lay in the ways those elements unfolded through the exchanges. For example, when I found that some instances evidenced the teachers' intentionality to invite pupils to reflect on their work, the sequences showed a shift towards correcting or when the teacher and the students interacted through what seemed initially a traditional exchange, the pupils' uninvited contributions slightly influenced what aspects of quality were brought in for discussion. Thus, some indistinct practices from getting the pupils to correct their work, to taking some actions forward and to reflect upon what they had produced, could interact within a single episode, and it was intended that the data reflect these aspects of the teacher participants' work.

Drawing on the work of Sadler (1989, 2007, 2010), Black & Wiliam (1998, 2003, 2006), Torrance & Pryor (1998, 2001) and the research developments examined in my literature review (see sections 2.3 and 2.6), I decided to focus on feedback as a door or

lens that allowed for an exploration of other areas involved in formative assessment. A great deal of data, that arose from this study, was concerned with the teachers monitoring, including to what extent the pupils knew and understood the criteria before engaging in a writing task or during the process of production itself. In this thesis I endeavoured to ensure that the episodes selected would portray the different strategies used by teachers in their work with the success criteria and what they seemed to imply for the children, as shown in the interactions.

Intertwined and also at the basis of the above, to select episodes I focused on the extent they might exemplify how teachers engineered questions and how they seemed to interpret pupils' responses (Black & Wiliam, 2009, 2012; Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001; Black et al., 2003; Leung, 2004). This issue formed the basis of many teacher-student exchanges in the different lesson phases and it was crucial to understand whether the data pertaining to verbal forms of feedback showed some signs of formative action. The literature on classroom talk reviewed in chapter 2 (See section 2.4) provided insights regarding how to narrate the episodes in terms of how the sequences of talk evolved. However, it was not the main focus of my analysis to test the relationship between classroom talk and formative assessment in itself. I sought to understand the extent to which verbal interaction opens opportunities for feedback that might help learning. Within this perspective, I was able to discuss my identified themes holistically.

As explained in the previous subsection (3.6.1), the evidence from classroom observation informed me how feedback instances were enacted mainly within Discussion content, Writing and Revision work phases of a lesson. This allowed me, throughout an iterative process of analysis, to select episodes that could also exemplify similar sequences within the broader context of the same lesson, in terms of the focus of feedback and its content. To illustrate this, I have provided the lesson context that triggered the actions within each episode, thereby making them more comprehensible (see analysis chapters from 4 to 7; subsections: 4.4.1, 5.4.1; 6.4.1; 7.4.1, respectively).

Bearing the above in mind to analyse the episodes within each stage of the lesson, I considered the following aspects:

- The Discussion content and Writing phases of the lesson were concerned with feedback being provided before pupils engaging with a writing task. This was pursued by discussing criteria for quality or devising a model example, respectively. Within these interactions, attention was paid to the nature of the exchanges, with the aim being to figure out whether they had to do with providing pupils with prompts of what needed to be done in order to complete the task or whether the intention was the enhancement of the quality of future work (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black *et al.*, 2003). To clarify this matter within the interactions, I used the distinction between task and quality criteria developed by Torrance & Prior (1998, 2001) (See chapter 2; literature review).
- The evidence from the phase Revision work was regards to how the teachers monitored their pupils' progress when they were approaching their task before presenting the final product. Here, the inquiry was focused on whether the teachers collected information from learners to support them in the understanding of quality (Black *et al.*, 2003) or whether these actions were driven by some other kind of reference points, for instance, to ensure the task was on target (Torrance & Pryor, 1998).
- However, it should be noted that regardless of the phase of the lesson, the 'fine-grain-ness' of feedback (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 2012) was an intertwined component of the analysis of the classroom episodes. That is, I focused on questioning as an indicator of what teachers seemed to want to elicit from children: correcting their work or promoting further understanding (Black & Wiliam 2009, 2012; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black *et al.*, 2003; Leung, 2004).

## **Teachers' perspectives**

Follow up interviews were used at different stages, on some occasions, in the form of brief post-lesson conversations, while at other times, the interview lasted around 20 minutes. During these encounters the teacher did reflect on her/his feedback practices concerning spoken interaction. They were able to describe the decisions made in implementing feedback one way or another. In the analysis of these teachers' accounts, I explored their explanations, by seeking to identify the principles that appeared to guide their actions in their classrooms. I also tried to discern the learning conceptualisations that appeared to be aligned with their assessment practices and those particular elements of a formative assessment approach that each teacher valued as important. I used a narrative account to report the follow up interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), as I considered it highly relevant to portray the teachers' views and emphasis posed, and what influences their beliefs on formative assessment.

### **3.6.3 Analysis of the interview data with reference to written forms of feedback**

The semi-structured interviews with the participant teachers were designed to shed light on aspects of their classroom practices in relation to the written feedback given to learners. As discussed earlier in this chapter, my approach to conducting the interviews was informed by the stance of Kvale & Brinkmann (2009). Under this optic, opinions and information are shaped within the dynamic interview process, whereby they are actively produced through the questions raised and the answers given. Hence, the knowledge obtained is contextual and relates to the interview situation. To analyse the interview data, 'meaning coding', as suggested by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), was adopted. From this perspective, coding has the purpose of 'allowing later identification of a statement by attaching key words to a text segment' (2009:202). Drawing on this the captured data were coded with reference to the conceptual framework underpinning this study and the coding process was iterative (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

This iterative process involved reading and rereading of the material to produce and refine codes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). A number of steps were involved in this as follows.



1. I carried out a full transcription of the interview data.
2. In the first phases, numerous codes were assigned, but as I went further through the transcripts subtle differences between codes could be noticed and some codes were thus amalgamated with others of similar meaning (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). This method also helped me to verify what new codes might be needed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).
3. Data were constantly compared (Charmaz, 2006). Contrasting the teachers' descriptions of strategies they implemented and their interpretations of their own actions. This process was carried out within the transcripts, at different points of the interview situation and between the four participant teachers. The data set from each participant teacher was revisited noting similarities and differences between participants' interview statements that had previously been categorised in the same way (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This was to understand the range of the teachers' thinking and their actions in relation to the meanings of earlier codes and categories. Thereby, the contrasting and comparison process established a good picture of what the participants believed and what they were doing when marking their students written tasks. Matrices were created containing the codes and under each, the pertinent utterances and/or interview extracts; a description of the code and some additional notes were provided (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Through devising these matrices. I captured the similarities and differences as well as grasping in a systematic and consistent way the essence of what the participants were narrating regarding how they were providing written feedback.
4. These matrices were studied repeatedly, thereby allowing me to refine my analysis through being able to look beyond the descriptions of strategies used by the participants. That is, I sought an understanding of the intention behind each and the espoused purposes.
5. The coded data became gradually more focused (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The analysis captured what the participant teachers did and what they believed concerning the various different ways in which they gave feedback to their learners. I have portrayed those elements that could be significant to the participants as well as

to understand their perspectives of what feedback should be, for instance, what they intended to convey (feedback messages) or what they wanted to assess in a piece of writing. At this stage, the aim was also to explore whatever strategies the teachers were using and what they expected their students to do in relation to them. The purpose of this was to capture the scope of the feedback practices within the cases. For, as the literature suggests, feedback information can help student learning, if it is used by them to identify what they have achieved and what they need to do next to improve (Black *et al.*, 2003). This is key to pupils understanding quality (Sadler, 1989). Hence, I focused specifically on the teachers' views of what their students were able to do in terms of recognising quality in a piece of writing (Black *et al.*, 2003; Harrison & Howard, 2009).

6. The participant teachers described a number of strategies and activities they used to provide feedback to their students in their writing tasks. Some of these practices included: Marking schemes (symbols); Highlighting or underlining procedures (sunshine and growth; different systems of colour coding) Written comments etc.
7. In the earliest stages of the analysis my focus was on how the different activities or practices were implemented, since the teachers gave me details of the various techniques they employed, such as those listed above. This process took me a while and during this time, I developed some provisional codes for these. These were designated by the terms used by the teachers, for instance: 'marking symbols' or 'success criteria table'. In the later steps of the analysis, I examined the material with the aim of understanding the intentions behind the strategies they deployed. By so doing, a shift in the coding was gradually achieved portraying how specific parts of the activities provided feedback to learners. In addition, elements within the activities that appeared to carry a formative intention were identified. I devised new codes to capture not just the practices, but also the associated meanings (Charmaz, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).
8. I initially worked with the data in a relatively open minded way, with no presumption of finding anything in particular. I carried on trying to make sure

of my coding accuracy, but if I felt it necessary I extended or amplified the categories, sub-codes and codes until I felt they fitted well. Accordingly, the emergent codes characterised the main aspects of the written forms of feedback identified by the participant teachers. Then, the codes were expressed in the form of sub-codes that reflected the feedback processes or portrayed the teachers' experiences. Subsequently, different categories arose that pertained to particular aspects (meanings and actions) within each sub-code and code.

To sum up, when devising the codes, I sought to move progressively beyond the very specific techniques used by the participant teachers. I have illustrated the findings as a process within which the teachers' experience could be recognised. By so doing, the categories within each code still can trace the actions and reflections related to that process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Charmaz, 2006). This process of coding underpins the accounts of the participant teachers' approaches to written forms of feedback, as provided in: Chapter 4 (section 4.5), Chapter 5 (section 5.5), Chapter 6 (section 6.5), and Chapter 7 (section 7.5). A detailed example of how this process was pursued can be found in appendix 3.

### **3.7 Triangulation**

I have gathered data in relation to the focal phenomenon at three different sites, from different points in time and from the accounts of four participant teachers. This allowed me to carry out data-source triangulation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). That is, by observing the same class in a school over an extended period of time and capturing episodes where feedback potentially occurred could confirm the extent to which the findings remained consistent across the research period. The insights provided by each participant teacher with respect to their assessment practices, enabled me not only to examine my previous or initial inferences, for it also led to the enrichment of my understanding, in particular, in terms of widening the possible reasons that drove their actions when enacting verbal feedback. The teachers' interviews were semi-structured in format and were aimed at understanding the drivers that lay behind their written forms of feedback. Moreover, they brought a number of their students' books to illustrate their explanations. I

have introduced some of these examples when reporting these findings, with the participants' permission, in order to provide a more complete picture of their approach when doing marking.

The combination of methods to collect and analyse the captured data enabled me to apply methodological triangulation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Silverman, 2011). The comparison process helped, on the one hand, to confirm which inferences were more likely to provide a robust explanation or interpretation of the teachers' approaches. On the other, it highlighted contradictions as conflicting evidence emerged. This opened an opportunity to unpack new developments and understandings, which, in turn, brought me close to understanding the reality of these three primary schools.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

This study involved collecting data in ordinary classroom settings. It was, therefore, important to ensure that it was carried out in a respectful way that would safeguard the interests and rights of the research participants. For this purpose, I consulted the British Sociological Association's (BSA) statement of ethical practice. In this document, professional integrity, the relationship with research participants and the findings being located in the context of the wider research community, are the main ethical concerns. I considered the views of some writers (Mason, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), who have discussed ethical dilemmas, specifically linked with qualitative research undertaken from a social constructionist stance. These authors argue that social reality is a multidimensional phenomenon, which in turn makes research ethics complex, as the researcher often has to adopt special procedures to gain approval for the study design, the sampling strategy and recruitment of participants.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009:71) suggest that disclosing complete information about the design and purpose of a study might discourage participants. It is likely that they will not be very interested in the details or they might be unfamiliar with the discipline, (Mason, 2002). At the outset, the researcher might not be entirely au fait with what will constitute useful data (Mason, 2002), because unexpected issues might arise along the way. Consequently, at the start of a research endeavour it is not easy

to have complete knowledge about what might be involved in the study and how this might impact on participants, beyond negotiating preliminary access (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Bearing these important considerations in mind, I applied for approval, which was subsequently granted by the Social Sciences & Public Policy, Arts & Humanities and Law Research Ethics Subcommittee (SSHL RESC), King's College London. The corresponding approval number is: SSHL/12/13-34, 3 May 2013 and once I had achieved this I followed the recommended procedures for recruiting participants, as follows.

I sought voluntary informed consent of teachers, their schools and the local authority. First, I met with the head teachers of the three schools to explain what the research was about and try to capture their interest. Next, I had meetings with those teachers who had initially expressed an interest in participating in the study within each school. This was in order to explain the nature of the study, why it was being undertaken, how the findings would be communicated, the potential future uses of the data and to assure them with regards to any concerns they had about confidentiality and anonymity.

To back up this information I gave the teachers and head teachers a formal letter that contained an overview of the study, data collection process and what the research would require from the volunteer participants. In general, the letter gave a more detailed description of the issues already raised in the meetings. It clearly stated that, while the findings would be disseminated, participants' identities would at all times be protected and no specific data disclosed without their permission or for any purposes other than my academic study. The potential recruits were overtly informed that they would have the opportunity to withdraw their consent and to stop participating at any stage.

I believe that the key ethical issues were covered in the letter that was sent to the potential participants and schools with the purpose of acquiring informed consent. However, in light of the warnings given by the authors above regarding maintaining ethical conduct and the evolving nature of any particular research project, I remained alert to any unforeseen situations and was prepared to act in accordance with the protocols set out by the university's Research Ethics Subcommittee.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Sophie, Class Teacher, St. Andrew's Primary School**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter is structured as follows. It begins with a description of the main components of the school policy on feedback with the purpose of contextualising Sophie's experience in the classroom. Next, it presents the class teacher by giving introductory information about her work on feedback and formative assessment. Then, the results section is developed, which contains a number of subsections, the first of which refers to observation data and presents the analysis of selected classroom episodes or events that have the potential for feedback to occur. This is complemented by the analysis of the follow up interviews in order to document some reflections from the teacher on her own assessment practices in her lessons. Subsequently, a summary is provided pointing out the main insights that emerged from the participant teacher's feedback during spoken interaction. The chapter also reports on Sophie's approach to written forms of feedback based upon the analysis of the data gathered from semi-structured interviews and examples of marking in the pupils' books.

#### **4.2 Feedback Policy: St. Andrew's Primary School**

A new head teacher took up her post in April 2013. One month later, the school agreed upon a system of marking, which was intended to be consistent across each stage within the school. The head teacher, subject coordinators and teachers participated in developing the marking procedures. The main components of the policy were summarised in a four page document titled 'Marking and Feedback Policy' (May 2013), which was distributed amongst the members of staff. The document 'Marking and Feedback Policy' (May 2013) contains a description of the guiding principles as well as specific suggestions in terms of marking procedures that can be applied by teachers.

- **Principles**

The main tenets behind the policy can be summarised as: to provide feedback to children and to inform them of their achievements as well as the next steps in their learning; demonstrate appreciation of the children's effort; encourage self-assessment; inform future planning and learning; evaluate and assess children's learning; and to help parents to understand the strengths and areas to develop in their children's work.

In addition, the policy also establishes what should count as quality marking in literacy. Firstly, marking should be focused on children's learning, how to improve and personalised targets. It should draw on specific items taught as concepts, skills and knowledge. The emphasis should be on how to develop learning, rather than to apply learning objectives. For instance, writing a whole story, in which case, summary feedback would be more suitable.

Related to feedback in the writing tasks, the policy suggests that, through marking, a developing dialogue should be produced between the teacher and student, which should lead to pupils' making progress. This might be accomplished through a sequence of activities that comprise learner writing, teacher marking and the pupils incorporating the teacher's suggestions in their subsequent work. The school also determined the time allocated for children to respond to comments, called DIRT - Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time.

### **Strategies for marking**

One of the procedures that the policy asks the teachers to follow is to mark some aspects of the writing using a purple pen a minimum of three times a week. A marking scheme is suggested, which I saw posted on the 'Literacy Working Wall' of this teacher's classroom. This system is composed of symbols to call attention to different aspects about a piece of writing. Some of them are used to acknowledge that good work has been done by a student, whilst others address corrections of basic errors related to punctuation, grammar and spelling. There are also symbols that focus on the quality of writing in a broader sense. However, despite the symbols being used, there is no further explanation in the policy about how they can be effectively employed. All the policy states is that they can be used to improve students' work,

but they do not tell the teachers how this can be done.

What it is represented by each symbol or what it is attempting to communicate about the children's work is illustrated below:

✓	Good work
✓✓	Very good
P	Punctuation error in that line
Sp	Spelling error to be looked up and corrected
~~~~	Wiggly line put underneath the error
?	This does not make sense
CL	Capital letter needed or in the wrong place
^	An omission
//or L	New paragraph

Another strategy addressed by the school was providing feedback through written comments, with the overall idea being to help the pupils to make specific improvements. The following are given in the policy in relation improvement prompts: the *reminder prompt*, which is aimed simply at reiterating the learning objective; the *scaffolded prompt*, involving making a suggestion on what could be written; and the *example prompt*, which refers to modelling a choice of possible improvement, whilst also asking the students to add their own ideas.

Peer assessment also has a place within the school policy, stating its purpose in terms of recognising strengths and areas to develop within a peer's work. It recommends that, in general, this strategy should be applied verbally and that children should use phrases like: '*This is good ... and it would be better if* '.... Nothing more is provided in this respect, but this method seems to have something in common with the strategy of two stars and a wish (Harrison & Howard, 2009), whereby the first phrase includes recognition of what has been done well and then even better if ('EBI') comments can be used to identify the next step for improvement.

Regarding self-assessment, the teachers are asked to promote the use of the RAG (Red, Amber, Green) system, for pupils to communicate how well they believe



they have achieved the learning objective. Each colour has a descriptor as follows: *Red: I have not attained many of the success criteria and would like support; Amber: I have attained enough of the success criteria to build on my understanding – child to say what it is they would like to look at; and Green: I have attained most, if not all the success criteria.* Again, nothing more is explained in relation to the declared purpose of this strategy. However, it could be said that it can be linked to the ‘Traffic light icons’ proposed in Black et al. (2003), as these authors give the idea of ‘students labelling their work using green, amber or red whether they think they have good, partial or little understanding’ (Black et al., 2003:51).

Generally, the aim of this section has been to illustrate the main components of the school policy related to feedback and this overview helps to situate Sophie’s experience concerning her own marking process implemented with her Y5 students.

#### **4.3 Sophie-Class Teacher**

Sophie was a teacher with 18 years teaching experience. She had been a teacher training mentor for about 10 years, working on the graduate teacher programme (GTP’) and the postgraduate qualification (PGCE’). She highlighted the opportunities offered within the school for observing the lessons of colleagues. She found it useful for capturing good practice and improving her teaching ‘...if I said, I was really struggling to teach triangles... I would go and watch Louis teach a lesson on triangles. So that I could then go, “Oh, what a great idea”, and take it away and use it in my classroom... so here at this school there’s a real ethos of sharing and everybody helping everybody else’ ... (Sophie, St Andrew’s Primary School. Int-3:16).

Despite formative assessment as a process having not yet been embedded in the school, as they had only recently developed and agreed a marking policy, Sophie was able to explain the core elements of the feedback practices contained within this policy and which of these aspects were salient for her. She felt that her teaching had been sharpened by knowing better where there was something that needed to be reinforced... ‘If there is a misunderstanding somewhere...I think, maybe I need to do some more work on that. So what it is doing is informing my planning’... (Sophie, St Andrew’s Primary School. Int-1:8). The changes in her planning, in turn, had an

effect on the pupils, for it meant that she could distinguish to a greater extent or more precisely, the learning needs of different children within her class:

*'...If you were identifying problems and there are three or four children having the same problem...hopefully, you are being very focussed with your teaching. So, you are addressing the need of that child at that moment.'... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-1:1)*

It appears that Sophie saw her role within a formative assessment approach, one of constantly noticing when her pupils were struggling with their understanding of a topic or in developing certain skills. For then, she could reflect on her teaching on an ongoing basis and devise appropriate activities in order to help them to achieve success

#### **4.4 Sophie's enactment of feedback practices inside the classroom**

##### **4.4.1 Feedback provided before the engagement with the task**

In this subsection, I examine a number of classroom episodes to illustrate the ways in which Sophie and her students engaged with success criteria. It could be argued that the selected extracts had the potential for students to explore what quality would involve in a piece of work and understanding the intended quality is an essential prerequisite for feedback to occur (Sadler, 1989). I have considered these episodes across different lessons, with the focus being on the 'Discussion-content' phase, within the interactional context of whole class-teaching, regarding which they adopted the following different forms: the teacher initiated a question & answer discussion in an attempt to gather the criteria from the students; the pupils were asked to identify particular aspects in given examples (texts) so as to get an idea of how they should use these in future tasks; or it was the teacher who modelled the criteria. The episodes under consideration seem to have shared a common purpose in terms of Sophie's monitoring including to what extent the students knew and understood the criteria before engaging in a writing task. Based on this premise, the analysis is focused on the nature of the exchanges in order to establish whether they were geared towards providing pupils with prompts about what needed to be done in order to complete the task or whether the intention was the enhancement of the quality of future work (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003).

These examples of interaction between Sophie and her pupils, where she engaged them in classroom discourse, allow for investigation of whether they involved promoting or constraining feedback opportunities. Accordingly, in noting how questions were framed and the ways in which Sophie seemed to have interpreted the student responses, can help in achieving a better understanding of what was being elicited from the children (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Leung, 2004) and what feedback meant in her lessons.

The analysis of each selected piece of data (assessment events or episodes) is preceded by an outline of the corresponding observed lesson. It comprises a description of the main phases with the specific aims and the activities carried out. This is intended to contextualise the issues that shape the interaction within the episodes that are brought in for examination.

- *Lesson context concerning Episode 1*

This was the third lesson observed in Sophie's class, on 8th October, 2013 (file: 711-0012). The learning objective of the lesson was *'To be able to write a diary extract'*. At the start of the lesson (Introduction phase) Sophie got the pupils to watch a video that told the story of Nark, an Egyptian young man who lives beside the Nile and was taken by the King's men to help build pyramids. The purpose of this activity was to stimulate their recall of this story chronologically in preparation for the writing they were later to produce. ... *'Okay, so your job today is going to be writing as Nark. You are going to step out of your shoes ... you are now going to be Nark, okay?'*... [00:13:57]. The teacher and her class engaged in Question & Answer interaction recapitulating Nark's story. Some questions posed by Sophie were: 'What do the King's men shout?', 'What does Nark realise when he hears these people calling?', 'Where they are going?', 'What happens as Nark is leaving?' 'What does mum say to Nark?' After sharing the sequential order of these events, Sophie restated the main task of the lesson and also signalled a shift within the sequences towards the discussion of the criteria involved in producing this sort of text: ...*'Now you are writing purely as Nark' ... 'So how we are writing this?' ... 'Would anybody know the phrase?' 'How would we write this as Nark?'* [00:31:56].

Within subsequent exchanges the teacher gathered ideas from the students on how they would approach this task. This pertained to the Discussion-content phase of the lesson, where Sophie used whole class teaching, which was also combined for a few minutes with collective group work encouraging the pupils to discuss on the criteria...*'Can you remember, what makes a good diary extract? I will put a few words up here so that you can write these down. Two minutes on your tables before working on your own'...* [00:35:10]. Subsequently, Sophie brought the class back together to see what they had argued. Some pupils' responses included 'writing in the first person', 'it has got a date', 'you have to show your feelings in your diary'. The teacher elaborated upon each of these elements mentioned by pupils and added a few more, such as to writing in the past tense and using informal language. Sophie then seemed to realise that, despite the work made at the start of the lesson, up to this point the pupils had not yet come up with the idea of organising their writing chronologically. She then attempted to introduce the criterion of using time connectives, which can serve to achieve this specific purpose within a piece of writing. This part of the interaction, specifically, is illustrated within Episode 1, that I have selected for analysis below. It shows the sequences in which the teacher and her class discuss this aspect of quality writing.

- *Episode 1: What do I mean by time connectives?*

The following extract was taken from lesson 3, 'Discussion content-phase' (file 711-0012); on 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2013) and it is preceded by the context of the lesson outlined above.

1. T: Okay, so in the first person, mostly past tense, possibly with dates. You must include your feelings in informal words and phrases. What might you be able to do to join your ideas together? This was S21's target, writing target. What is your writing target, S21? ... Connectives, what sort of connectives?
2. S 21: Writing slowly.
3. T: No, you had those other connectives, what were they?
4. S: I think it is to use better connectives.

5. T: What kind of connectives though? If this is a diary, what kinds of connectives might you use?
6. S: To link paragraphs.
7. T: To link paragraphs, how?
8. S: Would you use time?
9. T: Time connectives. Remember a diary is very much about time, isn't it? It is a period of time that you are writing about, so time connectives would be really good to use here. What do I mean by time connectives?

Sophie's initiating exchange '*What might you be able to do to join your ideas together?*', at first, appears to signal the desire to obtain more speculative responses or contributions. However, the subsequent questions and the comment she posed... '*This was S21's target, writing target*'... indicate that she was actually requesting specific information. S21 could not grasp what kind of connectives she/ he should be using (line 2), so the teacher made an evaluative comment and rephrased the question, which signalled to the rest of the class that the appropriate answer had not yet emerged (line 3).

The interaction evolved following the contribution of another pupil (line 4), until he got a response that seemed close to what the teacher was searching for... '*Would you use time?*' (line 8). This led to Sophie using the pupil's answer, by transforming it into a more complete statement... '*Time connectives*' (line 9), seemingly making the judgment that this criterion for writing a diary had been taken on board and thus, she reinforced, by herself, the reasons why they were discussing this topic. Line 9 is repeated below along with how the interaction continued:

9. T: Time connectives. Remember a diary is very much about time, isn't it? It is a period of time that you are writing about, so time connectives would be really good to use here. What do I mean by time connectives?
10. S: You would say I have got the times at the end of the paragraph.
11. T: Okay, 9 o'clock?
12. S: Well maybe an hour ago or maybe ...
13. T: We tend not to be quite so specific as giving an actual length of time.  
We use vague words that we ... What kind of words would we use, S2?

14. S2: First, finally.
15. T: Yes, first, finally, after that, then ...
16. S2: Eventually.
17. T: Sometime later, yes, later that day. Those are the kinds of time connectives that we are talking about.
18. S: So, like first and next?
- 19.** T: Yes, next, after that, meanwhile – those are the time connectives. Good, okay. Obviously it needs to be chronological, we have said about that, in the order that things happen. You wouldn't normally write a diary out of order... *(The sequences that followed this extract addressed briefly another two points that needed to be considered for the pupil's writing task, adjectives - to describe feelings and adverbs –to describe how things are being done. Then, the teacher signalled the starting of the writing phase of the lesson, which is followed by the Revision work-phase, getting the pupils to read out their pieces of work, until when the lesson ended [01:17:20]).*

The teacher introduced another question, which appears to have served the function of getting the pupils to know what 'time connective' meant, but she framed this question as '*What do I mean by time connectives?*' (line 9), which led to one child seeming to interpret the inquiry as guessing what was inside the teacher's head, answering...'*you would say I have got the times at the end of the paragraph*' (line 10). Sophie decided neither to accept nor to reject this response, and encouraged the pupil to provide an example of what he/she? meant with the word '*ok*' thus being enunciated as part of a question (*i.e.* 'Okay, 9 o'clock?').

It should be noted that, in the same line, Sophie's inquiry also suggested a counter example... *9 o'clock...*, which resulted in the pupil giving a similar response and therefore, not a satisfactory one (line 12). Sophie then engaged in a brief exchange with another pupil, S2, sharing some examples, including ... 'first, finally, after that' (lines 13-17) and hearing these seems to have benefited the first pupil who previously had not provided the right answer. However, it was not possible to ascertain whether it helped her/ him in terms of understanding or recalling the sort of time connective words to be used in the writing task, as she/he responded...'*So, like*

*first and next?*’... (line 18). In both cases, Sophie confirmed each pupil’s utterance and closed this part of the interaction by restating why time connectives should be used in the writing of a diary. Then, she moved on to the next sequence.

In this episode, it seems that Sophie was trying to examine the students’ knowledge about time connectives before they engaged with the actual writing task as well as establishing this as a feature that would count for quality in a diary extract. Within this perspective, the Q & A sequence was serving the purpose of her being able to make judgements and provide feedback about this. However, the ways in which the questions were posed made it difficult to interpret the exchanges as facilitators of formative assessment, at least, in the ways they seemed to affect the few students involved. This is because the linguistics choices tended to elicit guessing rather than reasoning, thereby constraining the intended purposes of the interaction.

The extract illustrates that a broader exploration of quality was not clearly achieved and that the teacher’s intention of addressing some of the students’ answers was competing with the need to accomplish the lesson task. At this point, the distinction made by Torrance & Pryor (1998) between task criteria and quality criteria can facilitate explanation of this episode. It can be argued that this interaction helped the pupils in the understanding of what needed to be done in order to complete the task (*task criteria*), but it is more difficult to assert that they understood how to enhance the quality of future work (*quality criteria*).

- Lesson context regarding Episode 2

This corresponded to the fifth lesson observation that took place in Sophie’s class on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 (file: 711-0042). The learning objective stated for this lesson was ‘To be able to retell myths from history and compare them to the reality of science’. Within the Introduction-phase, the teacher prompted the pupils to recall the previous lesson, where they were given iPads to search for information, in particular, about one of the ancient Egyptians’ beliefs about how the sun moved across the sky. The pupils also had started to write about this first myth, which tells about the God called Ra (The sun) that travelled during the day, died into the desert at night and

went into the underworld, with the next Ra being born again the next morning. Sophie progressively asked questions to the class in an attempt to rebuild this story: 'I wonder if somebody on your table could give us the first part of that story –the one that we discovered together?', 'can anyone add a bit more detail to that? S12?'. A few students participated within these sequences (S28-S12-S16) (file: 711-0042), which ended with Sophie providing a summary explanation regarding this Egyptian belief. Then, she added a set of questions focused on the contrast of this myth with the scientific perspective, for instance, 'if you think about science, what have they got wrong when they believe the sun was carried across the sky?' After having obtained the correct response from one child, Sophie elaborated further upon it and then decided to carry on with the main activity of the current lesson ...*'okay there is another belief. I am not going to ask you to search for this one...But I did manage to find a really nice video for you, which I know you will all love'...* [00:11:30].

Next, the teacher and her class engaged in the observation of the video and the subsequent discussion in relation to it. Basically, the second Egyptian belief is that the sun was rolled across the sky by a huge invisible dung beetle and that at the end of the day it was either buried or eaten by a cow goddess. Using a Question & Answer structure, Sophie appeared to have the intention of checking pupils understanding by collectively rebuilding the story. When this purpose was achieved, she returned to the first story for a while and showed to her pupils an example that she wrote on the whiteboard, inviting the class to analyse the model provided. This was done, perhaps, by considering that the writing they had to do for the current lesson needed to be necessarily connected with this first story: *'we are going to the first story in a minute and I 'll tell you roughly how that is going to look. We will go through the second story and produce that together and then this afternoon we will talk through the science and see if we can get our writing done...'* [00:27:28]. I have selected Episode 2, examined below, which occurred when the teacher resumed the work regarding the second Egyptian belief by inviting the pupils to devise a model with her.



- *Episode 2: Can somebody extend that sentence so that we don't get too quickly into the story- S13?*

The extract below comes from lesson 5, Writing-phase (file: 711-0042; on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2013) and it is derived from the lesson context provided above.

1. T.: ...you need to be connecting your paragraphs. So your writing has a nice flow, everything kind of matches if you like –your paragraphs match together. Now S20 and S9 and I were having a conversation about how would you write your first sentence for this story to connect it to the one you have just finished – this story about Ra – how would you connect the two? And I think S20 has kind of come up with the right thing. So tell me what you said, S20?
2. S20: The ancient Egyptians also believed that the dung beetle had a [*inaudible* – 00:40:44]  
(Teacher writes down the phrase up to the word “believed”)
3. T: Right, I think we’ve gone too quickly into the story, okay? So we need to not say anything about the dung beetle just yet. Which is the word in that sentence which connects it to the sentence before? To the word before? Which is the word there that connects that sentence with the one before?  
(three pupils respond: ‘also’)
4. S20: Is it also?
5. T: Also – just that one little word and there is your connection between this paragraph and the one before. Well done, S20. Okay, so the dung beetle is not in yet, so let’s go back to the believed ... [*“The ancient Egyptians also believed”*]...Can somebody extend that sentence so that we don’t get too quickly into the story. S13?
6. S13: The ancient Egyptians also believed another story, (*pause*) which involved one of their lucky charms.
7. T: [*“Which involved “* - I like the use of the word which - [*“involved one of their lucky charms”*] Good, and basically what you have done now is you’ve not only connected this to the previous story, you have also introduced an idea that this next story involves one of their lucky charms. So people are straight

away thinking, oh, what's an ancient Egyptian lucky charm, I wonder what this story is going to be about? So you have captured your reader's interest, okay, and then they will want to read on to find out exactly what the story is all about. And this is where you can go on now to explain what they actually thought. Okay, so how would the next bit go, S27?

8. S27:Erm

Sophie asked a student to share a sentence which could serve to start the writing of the second story. The example given by S20 was not sufficiently thorough, because this pupil suddenly announced the whole story (line 2) and so, Sophie responded ... *I think we've been too quickly into the story, okay?* (line 3). However, she still used a bit of the phrase to ascertain whether the student could identify the word she/he used to connect paragraphs...*'Which is the word in that sentence which connects it to the sentence before?'*... (line 3). S20, a bit hesitant, mentioned the word 'also' (line 4) and then, the teacher confirmed that this was correct, thus providing positive feedback (line 5). However, it would appear that conflicting objectives were at play within this exchange, for while Sophie was paying attention to the pupil's contribution, she closed this part of the interaction by stating the right answer instead of exploring alternative ideas to illustrate how to link paragraphs.

Nevertheless, line 5 also reflects that Sophie encouraged students to build upon the sentence previously discussed, by continuing to develop the paragraph. She prompted them not to tell the complete story and addressed her question to S 13. When the child suggested a sentence (line 6), Sophie's feedback focus moved towards a more sophisticated criterion, namely, how to grab the reader's interest (line 7). Drawing on S13's example, she decided to provide a detailed explanation, which was intended to be taken up by the whole class. She was trying to get the children to visualize what this aspect of quality looked like in that piece of work. Next, she made explicit to the class that only then was it time to describe the second Egyptian belief and requested another pupil to come up with a sentence in order to keep going with that bit of the story. S27 did not articulate an answer at the first attempt (line 8) and so, Sophie decided to repeat her question (line 9):

9. T: [*"The ancient Egyptians also believed another story, which involved one of their lucky charms."*] What was the second story about?
10. S27: It was about dung beetles – the ancient Egyptians believed it was a dung beetle that was the sun.
11. T: Why did they believe that?
12. S27: Because dung beetles [...]
13. S27: The dung beetles roll up some dung so they think that the dung beetle is rolling the sun.
14. T: Right, so why don't we start with that then? We start with science, the fact – we know what happens and then say why. We can say that it is that fact that made the ancient Egyptians believe what they believed, yes? So let's start with, [*"The ancient Egyptians also believed another story which involved one of their lucky charms."...*] so what did they see? ...

*(within the subsequent interaction, the teacher kept collecting more ideas from the students and then wrote them down on the whiteboard. These sequences lasted until the point when some parts of the writing had been completed and the teacher left the rest of it to be worked by the pupils independently [00:54:40]).*

This time, S27 provided a response by describing, broadly, the second story (line 10). Sophie used a follow-up with the intention of extending this pupil's answer. This took the form of a question aimed at probing the student's understanding of the topic, specifically, the reasons behind this Egyptian belief ...*Why did they believe that?...*(line 11). S27 offered an explanation (line 13) and Sophie considered the answer, but she was not yet writing down the information given on the whiteboard, preferring to put another question. The nature of this last query ...*so what did they see?...*(line 14) suggests that the student's response did not provide enough evidence for a competent answer. Alternatively, it could have been the case that Sophie's intention was to keep the line of inquiry open in order to explore the children's ideas about the theme further (line 14).

The data extract of this transcript, as a whole, demonstrates that the teacher focused her feedback on three aspects of the writing: how to connect paragraphs, how to capture the readers' interest and understanding of the content. These three elements were concerned with the idea of developing a model for writing and the connection between them seemed to be based on sentences provided by students who were invited by Sophie to make contributions. The extract also appears to reflect that the link between these three aspects remained at the surface in that each part of the interaction was directed at a single pupil's suggestion and the matter was concluded with the teacher stating her point in terms of what she needed to convey. This approach did not facilitate the students arriving at a consensus, because framing questions, such as '*Can somebody extend that sentence*', ended with '*so that we don't get too quickly into the story. S13?*' required the answer of one chosen child. As a consequence, the notion of quality as a communal property was not reinforced (Marshall & Drummond, 2006) and hence, the opportunities for formative action were restricted.

As in the previous episode, the focus of this interaction appears to be the meeting of task criteria (Torrance & Pryor, 1998). However, the nuances of this exchange must necessarily be noticed, for instance, it seems to be the case that grabbing the reader's interest is an intricate aspect of quality rather than to identify time connectives. Moreover, it is likely that Sophie wanted to exemplify this feature using one student's example to give her class an idea as the basis for them to carry out future tasks and if this was so, she clearly went beyond providing a simple reminder of what the students needed to do to complete a task.

- Lesson context relating to Episode 3

This pertained to the sixth lesson observed in Sophie's class, on 12th November, 2013 (file: 711-0047). The learning objective for this session was 'To be able to write a biography'. To begin the lesson (Introduction-phase), Sophie and her class recapped previous work done on biography writing. That is, they had already read *The Popcorn Pirates* by Ruby Bridges, and the pupils had been also been told that they should make up their own pirate and think about it. Accordingly, Sophie started by posing

some questions that were intended to cover the issue of what information should be included in this kind of text: 'When were you born pirate Robin?' 'Why did you become a pirate?' 'Where did you live when you were little?' Four pupils responded, talking about how they imagined their own pirates would be. (S28-S27-S2-S20) [00:00:04] [00:04:16]. After a few minutes of exchanges Sophie revealed the main task of the lesson.... *'So, what we are going to do today is to write a biography for our own pirates, okay?'*... [00:04:20].

However, the writing-phase did not commence immediately as Sophie conducted the interaction towards two more issues, which she pursued so as to add insights regarding how the pupils should write their pirate biography. The first was aimed at uncovering the sort of vocabulary that is characteristic of pirates. This involved observing a related video and pupil brainstorming in peers group to acquire the new vocabulary as well as the teacher posing questions, within whole class teaching to review pupils understanding of the new words they had found [00:05:10] [00:16:20]. The second point addressed by Sophie was to recap what a biography is, which involved questions within short exchanges, after which she summarised how the text should be structured and its distinction from other kinds of texts, for instance, an autobiography. [00:21:05]. When this had been done, the teacher decided to restate the aim of the lesson ...*'So, your learning objective today is going to be able to write a biography and let's have a look at the pirate that I invented'* [00:21:06]. I have singled out Episode 3 below for analysis, which relates to this modelling activity, where Sophie asked the students to pay attention to distinctive aspects of the example displayed and this was progressively extended as the discussion went on.

- *Episode 3: Are you sure it makes sense?*

The following transcript comes from lesson 6, Writing-phase (file: 711-0047; on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2013) and it stems from the lesson context described above.

1. T: Okay, so now I have got this information- (*teacher pointing to her notes on the whiteboard*) - I have now got to put this into sentences, haven't I? Because it would be a bit boring if I just listed all this information, wouldn't it? Yes, so I have now got to try and put this into a sentence. So let's have a

look to see how we can start. Okay. [*"Pirate Pete's Biography"*]. Okay. It starts with, [*"Pirate Pete was born on 10th January 1882 at Port Seashore in Devon"*] Okay? So I've made that into a sentence that makes sense, I think it makes sense, doesn't it? Does it make sense, S6?

2. S6: Yes.

3. T: Are you sure?

4. S6: Yes.

5. T: Have you read it? Are you sure it makes sense? Can you read it for me?

6. S6: Pirate Pete was born on 10th January 1882 at Port Seahorse ...

7. T: ... seashore ... Port Seashore, not seahorse.

8. S6: ... Port Seashore in Devon.

9. T: Although I have to say, I liked seahorse, Port Seahorse, I think that's nicer so I'm going to change it. I prefer Seahorse to Seashore and because this is my pirate, I can have him born anywhere I like. So I am going to change Seashore to Seahorse. Thank you, S6, I like that. Okay, so we have changed where he was born – he was born in Port Seahorse in Devon.

10. S: It doesn't make sense because you said Pirate Pete was born on 10th.

You should say Pirate Pete was born on the 10th.

11. T: No, not when we are doing dates. You only have to write the date – 10th January 1882 – you don't have to put on the 10th, okay? It's just ... it is kind of like mmm grammatically correct to not put the "the" in there. Although we say it, we wouldn't necessarily write it in. Okay. Now, see if you can work out how I wrote the second sentence. I wrote, [*"he was the second child of his parents Polly and Patrick Pinwin"*]. How did I know he was the second child? S21?

*S21 answered, and few more details were discussed about Pirate Pete's Life, then, the teacher made the observation below:*

12. T: ...So, not all of that information was in my notes, was it? So what I did was, I took my notes, made it into sentences and expanded on it, which is exactly what you are going to need to do. You have got some notes written down, things to do with your pirate, information about your pirate. You are going to have to take that information and expand it. Put it into sentences

that make sense and are in the correct order...

*(The sequences that followed this extract addressed the discussion of another feature for writing a biography as identified within the teacher's model. Then, Sophie and her class collectively settled upon the success criteria for the sort of writing. Time was subsequently allocated for the pupils to produce their pirate biographies [00:42:12]. Meanwhile, Sophie moved around the tables making suggestions to different children. Then, she returned to whole class teaching and signalled the starting of the phase Revision work [01:09:10]).*

The teacher invited a student to critique a sentence devised by her...*Does it make sense, S6?...*, but she had previously stated her own opinion ...*I think it makes sense, doesn't it? ...* (line1), which led to the student simply saying...*'Yes'...* (line2). Sophie persisted with...*Are you sure?...*(line 3), which suggests that the balance of this interaction had changed, for it was the student's turn to make observations. However, S6 repeated the answer and then, read the sentence from the whiteboard as requested (line 6).

The line of inquiry of this sequence shifted in another direction, which was signalled by the teacher's correction of a mispronunciation by S6 and her prompting ... *Port Seashore, not seahorse...* (line 7). Next, she changed her mind about the port's name (*Seahorse*) and instead of considering it as an 'error', this was taken up as idea to modify the information about her own pirate biography. She demonstrated that she valued this pupil's contribution when she explicitly said ...*'Thank you, S6, I like that'...* (line 9).

Next, another student spontaneously made an observation about what had been written regarding the date (line10), which represented a return to the discussion in terms of making sense of the writing. Furthermore, this pupil's initiation demonstrated that she/he? felt comfortable about engaging in the discussion without being invited to do so, by making the comment that something was not right within the sentence proposed by the teacher. This interaction could have been pick up on and extended so as to exploit its formative potential. However, Sophie only chose to describe why the suggestion given would be inappropriate ... *it is kind of like*  
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*grammatically correct to not put the “the” in there’... (line 11) and then she moved on to ask the class to focus on her second sentence.*

This episode involved different issues being at play. The teacher attempted to provide feedback on a complex aspect of writing quality in terms of “making sense”, for which she selected a strategy through which the students would comment on what she had written. However, this endeavour seemed to be constrained by the ways in which the sequence was structured and how the questions were posed. Sophie preferred to ask contributions from a small number of students and subsequent to each response, swiftly closed the exchanges. In my view, it raised unresolved issues between the intention of helping her students to visualise what quality looks like in a piece of writing ... *‘So what I did was, I took my notes, made it into sentences and expanded on it’... and the instructional messages conveyed ... ‘which is exactly what you are going to need to do’...(line 12)*

#### **4.4.2 Feedback on students’ work before the completion of the final product**

The selection of episodes explored in this section serves to exemplify another dimension of Sophie’s feedback practices that emerged from my observation data. They were taken from different lessons, specifically, within the phase ‘Revision work’ in the context of ‘whole class teaching’. The extracts are concerned with activities during which a number of students read aloud pieces of their work and the teacher gave oral and immediate comments to each one. It was also the case that Sophie asked her pupils’ opinion of their peers’ work, although this procedure was not observed extensively.

The actions within the episodes under examination appeared to be devised, on the one hand, to help students recognise what still needed to be done in order to improve their work. On the other, the teacher could get an idea of how the students were approaching the task and hence, monitor their progress during the stage that precedes the completion of the final product. How these purposes were emphasised by the teacher allows for discerning whether the focus was to pick up evidence from learners to support them in the understanding of quality (Black et al., 2003) or whether these actions were driven by some other kind of reference point, for instance,



to ensure the task was on target (Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

The nature of these exchanges was subtly different from those described in the subsection 4.4.1. The Q & A structure of the discourse was still present, but the qualitative comments on the pupils' pieces of writing (phrases-paragraphs) were much more evident among these episodes. Consequently, looking at how these verbal observations were framed and the messages conveyed to students can help to elucidate the scope of this feedback strategy; whether it was oriented towards correcting or encouraging the students to take further actions (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2009, 2012).

- Lesson context pertaining to Episode 4

The contextual information given with respect to Episode 3 is also applicable to Episode 4, as they were selected from the same observed lesson that took place in Sophie's class on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 (file: 711-0047). That is, they are both driven by the learning objective 'To be able to write a biography' (see subsection 4.4.1). Some phases of this lesson involved: recapping the previous lesson during which the grounds regarding what kind of information should be included in a biography had been established; discussing those elements that would help in terms of how to write this sort of text (vocabulary, structure); analysing a model provided by the teacher from which the criteria to be used had emerged; and, allocating sufficient time for writing Individually. Following this, the teacher signalled the starting of the Revision work- phase. This Episode 4 is located within this part of the lesson. Eight students were taking turns to read out the work completed so far, each one had made up their pirates, for instance: S10: Captain Paris [01:09:12]; S34: Captain Joe [01:11:53]; S26: Startling Mane [01:13:10]; S9: Captain Devilfish [01:15:07]; S 13: Captain Treasure [01:18:09]; S2: Captain Moody [01:21:58]; S16: Captain Fisher [01:26:17]; and S 12: Captain Skull [01:27:48]. Sophie made verbal comments on each of these students' pieces of work based on the criteria already sorted out, for instance, the use of past tense or the use of pirate vocabulary. However, after listening the work produced by some students, Sophie seemed to become aware that

they were having difficulties in adopting non narrative forms to write factual texts. Accordingly, she focused her feedback on that salient aspect of the writing. From the sequences that show this feedback orientation I have selected Episode 4 that is examined below.

- Episode 4: ...*you are telling a story rather than writing a biography*...

The extract of the transcript below comes from lesson 6 (file: 711-0047; on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2013) and it is preceded by the lesson context outlined above.

1. T: ... let's see what we have written so far, S9. Who's your pirate?
2. S9: Captain Devilfish.
3. T: Captain Devilfish? Very inventive name, well done. Off you go.
4. S9: [*"Millions of moons ago, pirates sailed the seven seas. The age of the pirate and ... On a lazy afternoon, Devilfish was eating some tea when an alert came from the crow's nest, "Land ahoy, land ahoy," shouted Pirate Billy, "I think it might be the legendary Island of Gold". When Devilfish was young, his father told him to whack his head against a rock, so he did it and the boulders split in two."*] ... I'm going to explain why I just put that.
5. T: Okay, no that was fine. My worry is more that you are telling a story – great story – but you are telling a story rather than writing a biography. So we need that factual information first – this is great – you can have this in the end as something that happened to him but really at the beginning to introduce your character in biography, you always write factual information first. So where and when they were born, that kind of things. Okay. I think you might have to backtrack. Okay, so you said when he hit his head on the boulder - Yes, you might have to backtrack a bit. So now do like a flashback – so you say, you kind of stop where you are, because where you are is an exciting bit, isn't it? Where he has split this rock open. So you can now go back and say, Captain Devilfish was born on ... do you know what I mean, and do that introductory information. Yes? Okay, that's fine though, that's absolutely fine. S13 who is your pirate?

*(The subsequent exchanges showed four more children reading aloud their pirate's biography and receiving teacher comments. The pupils were given three more minutes to read their partner's work, and then Sophie announced that in the following Literacy lesson, on the same day, at 12 o' clock, they would be given more time to amend their work [01:30:28]).*

After finishing the reading of Captain Devilfish's biography, S9 expressed that she/he wished to explain an aspect of the work done (line 4). It would appear that Sophie did not take any notice of this pupil's intention (line 5) and in doing so, a potential opportunity to trigger an in depth discussion was lost. Perhaps, while she listened to the student's version she was gradually building up her own judgment of what needed to be noticed regarding the piece of work. Her main concern appeared to be that this pupil had written the biography in story mode and she wanted to highlight this important aspect of the writing ... *'My worry is more that you are telling a story'...* (line 5), thus her feedback was geared towards addressing how the student appeared to have interpreted the task rather than correction of a particular feature.

In addition, when providing her comment, Sophie acknowledged some aspects of the work produced by S9 (*i.e. this is great / where you are, is an exciting bit, isn't it?*), she also gave some advice aimed at getting her/him to refine her/his work. She extended her observations by trying to get the pupil to visualise what actions should be taken and how, in order to improve the writing. Thus, it can be said that Sophie's feedback, in this episode, went beyond just correcting.

However, how the teacher's comment affected the child involved cannot be inferred from this extract, for it was about Sophie identifying important issues to be addressed by the student in her/his work. It was the teacher who marked the end of this exchange by providing a general positive observation (*i.e. that's fine though, that's absolutely fine*) and then moving on to ask another pupil to get her/him to present her/his work.

- Lesson context with regard to Episode 5

This relates to the tenth lesson observation that took place in Sophie's class on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2014 (File 711-0128). The learning objective of the lesson was 'We are learning how to write personification'. Sophie started by inviting her class to recap the previous lesson, which involved asking the pupils to read again the poems: 'River' by Valerie Bloom and 'A River's Journey' by Angela Yardy (Introduction-phase). After this shared reading activity, the teacher reminded her class how the day before they had identified the words used by the poet to make the river sound human, which they achieved through text marking. Then, she made the distinction of explaining what the purpose was for the current session, which went beyond identifying the devices in a given text towards the use of them, especially personification [00:09:26].

The subsequent phase of the lesson (Discussion-content) was characterised by pupils identifying more of those words within the poems that created imagery, through collaborative group-work. Not only did they look for personifications, but also others devices (alliterations-onomatopoeia- powerful verbs-rhyme). Regarding which, Sophie instructed her class: *Okay, so let's look at what other things has the poet used to give us a really good picture of the river? What kind of words are they?* [00:11:10]. A Question & Answer interaction was used to check on whether the pupils' task had elicited the correct identification of the devices as well as the definition of them. Then, the teacher marked the end of this activity and addressed the focus of subsequent work, now, specifically towards personification *'Good, well done. That's enough. Right, okay, now it is your turn... to start thinking how you could describe the river using personification'* [00:30:06]. Next, she used a video that allowed her pupils to observe different types of river and listen how they sounded. This acted as a preface to the upcoming task, where the students, in pairs, were asked to draw up a list of types of river or parts of them with the help of a dictionary, for instance cascade, rivulet, stream, etc. in order to write sentences that could personify these. After 20 minutes time having been allocated for this activity, the teacher signalled the starting of the Revision work-phase, within which ten students were asked to read their work out: *What we are going to do is see what ideas some people have had...*[00:53:50].

From the teacher-student interactions that were part of this phase of the lesson I have singled out the Episode 5 which is examined below.

- Episode 5: *...You get a real feeling from the personification there...*

The following extracts were taken from lesson 10, Revision work-phase (file: 711-0128; on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2014) and they are framed by the lesson context explained previously. It should be noted that while the interactions have a main focus on personification, Sophie identified slightly different issues in her pupils' work that were important to note and made her comments based on these aspects. In order to reflect upon these particularities in her feedback, this time I incorporate some teacher-student short exchanges that occurred just before this episode.

The example below illustrates how Sophie might have interpreted the student response as mixing up alliteration and personification and attempted to clarify the distinction by giving specifics prompts:

1. T.... S1
2. S1: The rapids run like Usain Bolt.
3. T: Yes, the rapids ran like Usain Bolt – you have got some alliteration there as well. Well done. Rather than actually putting a name to it, maybe we just say a sprinter or a runner or a ...
4. S: An athlete.
5. T: An athlete, yes, that's a good word, yes. Rather than give it a person's name because it makes it a bit ... it sounds a little bit contrived when we give it somebody's name. It is better if we just say what that person is – describe that person.

In the next example, the phrase proposed by student 7...*'The effluent was different to other rivers...'* (line 1) led to Sophie giving another form of advice. She suggested to this pupil to find out, first, what 'effluent' meant, because that would enable her/him to attribute human traits to it and thus, produce personification. This feedback revolved around the idea of going back to working with the dictionary, as Sophie perceived this would help the student to achieve a better understanding:

1. T: The effluent? Was different to the other currents? Okay, what I think we need to do TA, that's ... The effluent was different to other rivers – okay. We need to give it a human trait, we can't just say it was different we have got to say it was a person, what kind of person was it? What is an effluent?
2. S7: It's a type of river.
3. T: I know it is a type of river but what type of river is it?
4. S7: I am not sure.
5. T: No, you need to look that up, so that you can attribute a human trait to it, okay, which means you want to know what type of river it is. We know a tributary is a small river so we can attribute a small human trait to it – do you see what I mean? So you have to know what type of river the effluent is to be able to attribute the right kind of human trait to it, okay? So maybe you need to look up effluent and see what it says about it. S26?

Afterwards, the interaction continued in a similar tenor, with three more students reading out their work and Sophie making a comment in each case. The following exchange between her and S13 occurred at the end of this sequence and is closely examined here:

1. S13: I've done the rapids.
2. T: The rapids.
3. S13: [*"The rapids are an army, flowing to their destination to take on the ocean's waves"*]
4. T: Fantastic. That's brilliant, S13- *pupils clapped*- Not just one person, an army and the rapids that's what they look like, don't they? They don't look like one person running about, it's like hundreds of people running about. Read it again, S13.
5. S13: [*"The rapids are an army, flowing to their destination to take on the ocean's waves"*]
6. T: Fantastic. I am not sure about *flowing to* – can you think of a word that armies do?
7. S13: March.
8. T: Marching would have been perfect there. Right, now give me that

with the ... no don't rub it out, just write it across the top and then I can see where you've changed it. Right, read that now with the other word in. Are you listening?

9. S13: [*"The rapids are an army, marching to their destination to take on the ocean's waves"*] (*Pupils clapped*)

10. T: Fantastic, brilliant, I really like that, well done. You get a real feeling from the personification there. You have got an image in your head of lots and lots of water, charging, marching, charging even towards something for a reason and it is going to be battle with the waves in the sea. They'll all mix together when they get there eventually, won't they? It will all mix in together. So, they have got to find the sea because they are going to be mixing with it. So, it is having a fight – they can't win because the sea would win, but it is a battle. Fantastic, S13, thank you. Right, what I really like is now more and more people are now going "Ah, I've got ...", which means you are starting to get those ideas and that's exactly what I knew would happen. You start slowly, you start with oh I don't know about this, I can't get on and then you get ideas from other people or suddenly you think of something and you can [...] you can start to develop those ideas.

*(The subsequent exchanges showed six more children reading aloud their pieces of work. The teacher announced that in the following literacy lesson, the next morning, they would share again the work produced today [01:24:20]).*

This student associated '*the rapids*' with an army, as a way to attribute a human character to this part of a river and so to build personification (line 3). Sophie reacted to S13's idea conveying, first, positive feedback... '*Fantastic. That's brilliant*'... and combined this comment with a description that would reflect why this was so inventive, subsequently asking the pupil to reread it (lines 4-5).

After listening to the sentence for the second time, Sophie's discourse still revolved around the notion of recognising that the work had been well done, in broad terms, by saying, ... '*Fantastic*'... However, the follow up... '*I am not sure about flowing to – can you think of a word that armies do?*'... (line 6) gave more specific information

about the piece of work and led to the refinement of the student's answer. The pupil got an alternative suggestion (i.e. march instead flow, line 7) and started to cross out the words '*flowing to*' in his book, but was stopped by Sophie when she said...'*No don't rub it out*'... (line 8). This small act might have signalled that when the teacher raised the possibility of improvement to a piece of work in class, the pupil had interpreted this as that she/he was being asked to correct what was wrong. It would appear, however, this was not the first priority for Sophie and then she asked S13 to read out the enhanced version of the work (line 9). From this perspective, it could be argued that feedback did not focus on pointing out that the first attempt was a mistake, but rather, was about how something that was right could be made even better.

Sophie provided a final extended comment in which she reinforced positive messages about S13's work and also reaffirmed or made explicit that all of this was about the topic of personification. Furthermore, she added some ideas about how S13's work, particularly, could continue (... i.e. '*So they have got to find the sea, because they are going to be mixing with it. So it is having a fight – they can't win, because the sea would win but it is a battle...*'). Conceivably, these prompts served as having a two-fold aspiration. On the one hand, Sophie was concerned about triggering her students' imagination, whilst on the other, she was hoping that this sort of interaction would stimulate other pupils' original ideas. This is why after drawing on some students work she gave a host of suggestions regarding how the stories could end. It should be noted that, Sophie closed these sequences by saying ...'*what I really like is now more and more people are now going "Ah, I've got ...", which means you are starting to get those ideas and that's exactly what I knew would happen...*' (line 10). This last message provides an indication of Sophie's intended purpose when she asked her class to read aloud their pieces of work, namely, she wanted more pupils to benefit from her feedback.



#### 4.4.3 Teacher's perspective

In what follows, I make reference to the interview data in order to document some reflections from the teacher on her assessment practices within her lessons. Sophie was interviewed on three different occasions, two of which took the form of brief post- lesson conversations: file: 711-0020; on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2013; and file: 711-0048; on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2013, within a week or so of episodes of interest. The third interview lasted around 20 minutes and was carried out on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.

Some of the views expressed by the teacher corresponded with the lessons where the chosen episodes took place, whilst others concerned other lessons in which the same sort of activity or strategy was carried out. This occurred, because Sophie's description of a particular interaction often went beyond the specific example, being linked to broader issues. For instance, when commenting about episodes related to modelling a piece of writing, she pondered the challenges in implementing this strategy as a tool for helping her students to achieve quality in their work. Similarly, when describing some of the sequences within the 'Revision work phase', she reflected on the decisions that were taken from feedback information, whether she considered the students achieved or not the intended learning. Bearing these considerations in mind, the teacher interviews provided insights into the underlying principles driving her actions and interactions with her students. Three salient intertwined issues could be identified, the first of which concerns the intention behind the modelling strategy; the second, pertains to the focus of feedback, whether it was oriented towards correctness or improvement; and the third relates to the teacher's role in formative assessment.

- Modelling

It appears that Sophie wanted her students to have a sense of what quality looks like before they engaged in the actual piece of work. She did this by showing them some examples for discussion or even inviting them to devise some templates together in order to trigger understanding ... *'I think the modelling is really important for children – I know it is, because if you don't model, you don't get the quality of work...'* (Sophie,

*St. Andrew's Primary School. Int-3:7).* Then, she explained that this process was aimed at encouraging the students to take a more active role in analysing how to improve their own work.

*I think the teacher needs to be aware that you can't give them everything- something has to come from them. They have to have some ownership of the lesson as well. So, that's why we sometimes put up our modelling examples and then say, "What do you think of that? ...What could you do to make this better?" So, then they are constantly thinking about, okay I will reread my work, but I bet there is something I can do that will make it better... so constantly reflecting on their work. (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-3:8)*

It should be noted that the teacher used '*needs to be, have to*', which underlines the strength of her belief. For her, the purpose of the modelling strategy should be to get the students to reflect on their work, but, this intention seemed difficult to enact fully. The evidence from the extracts within the previous section (see for example episodes 2 and 3) illustrated that, while the teacher was concerned with asking for pupil contributions, the sequences were swiftly closed or moved on to another point of discussion and hence, further exploration of alternative ideas or reasoning from the pupils appeared to be hardly achievable. The analysis of these two episodes also shows that Sophie attempted to provide feedback on intricate aspects of quality writing, that is, how to engage the reader's interest or how a piece of work makes sense. Thus, it could be said that she tried to guide her students to improve their work, but despite her intention it was still not possible to ascertain to what extent they were able to use the feedback information to identify next steps in learning. In other words, the exchanges appeared to be skewed towards instruction rather than modelling.

In her interview, Sophie related how she struggled in translating her desired purpose into classroom practice. She attributed some difficulties she encountered to the need to cater for the different abilities of her students:

*Unfortunately, you have to weigh up that ... there is always a dilemma, how much do you model or how little do you model? Some children will need more than others, which is why we might model a bit, but then a small group of children will have an adult working with them to help them*

*through the modelling process, if you like, of the next part, because they can't actually do it without being modelled all the way through. (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-3:7)*

The above statement provides details regarding decisions made by Sophie to deal with the enactment of the modelling strategy. However, it also portrays the view that some children will not get it by themselves. It could be the case that Sophie was thinking about these children when providing feedback in the episodes discussed above and this could explain why the vast majority of the interactions remained under her control in terms of: rephrasing the students' answers into more appropriate forms; stating the main points for discussion; and summarising the essential aspects of the intended quality in each activity.

- The feedback focus

It can be seen that, in the episodes already examined, Sophie addressed a variety of aspects of quality writing, including: using connectives, working with figurative language, capturing the reader interest and ensuring the writing makes sense. The ways she approached this did not allow for ascertaining as to whether it was the nature of the task that led Sophie to provide feedback sometimes emphasising just the basics (i.e. grammar, punctuation), and on another occasions centering on holistic aspects of quality. For example, if she was teaching connectives, then she would focus on correctness, whereas if the work was about the Ancient Egyptians she would mainly pursue understanding. My observation data suggests that she wanted to provide feedback on both basic and complex aspects of quality as well as understanding of the topic. Throughout her interview, Sophie did not specify further what was the foremost guiding principle that underpinned her decision, on what to focus on, when providing feedback. She did not overtly mention that one aspect of writing took precedence over another. However, she did express the view that all lessons should involve working with cross curricular subject matter and when she was asked to elaborate on this, she pointed to the example of the topic Ancient Egypt, which they had studied for one month, during which time the pupils learnt how to write a variety of kinds of texts.

*If you teach persuasive writing or if you teach diary writing, you can do it in whichever medium you want. So that's how we make it cross curricula, because like I said, we have done Ancient Egypt, but actually we have done diary writing, biography writing and instruction writing. So, we are covering all the literacy targets but through our topic of Egypt. So, there is a lot to do ...a lot to cover (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-4:2)*

In this utterance, Sophie was talking from a teaching stance, describing how the writing of different sort of texts had to be dealt with through the main topic and she added that it was the way in which everything required could be covered. This could be indicative that she wanted to devise feedback practices that took into account as many issues as possible. As a result, she focused on diverse aspects of quality, in a structured way, as stated in the curriculum, which possibly hindered the purpose of pupils' understanding about how to improve their work.

- The teacher's role

When we were discussing lesson 10 (file: 711-0128; on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2014), Sophie explained that she started to work on personification in a previous session, but she had assessed that her class had not achieved the expected learning. So, in this lesson she introduced videos to help especially those children with lower abilities to get an idea of how different sort of rivers could be personified, for as she explained:

*... The children didn't really get it yesterday – today, because they have started to try and use it themselves, that gives them a better understanding. And using the pictures, the videos, I use those because the children I was working with, those lower ability children, will never have seen a stream or a torrent or anything like that and they won't know the difference ...' (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-2:1)*

From this statement, it would seem that Sophie was using formative assessment to inform her future whole class teaching. She tried to scaffold the learning in order to get pupils to where she thought they should be in terms of their understanding. When some pupils continued struggling to understand, she decided to provide more material that she used in a corrective manner.

In the above example, it can be seen that feedback had an effect on future planning,

whereby picking up elements that had not gone well provided the basis for modifying subsequent teaching and learning activities. This brings me back to my classroom observation data. In the analysis of the episode 5 (see subsection 4.4.2), I highlight how the teacher noted that her class benefited after listening to their peers' work about the use of personification, but in her interview Sophie seemed to interpret this differently. She placed an emphasis on those children who had not yet achieved the intended goal:

*Well the thing was they didn't... they started to get it today, they didn't get it quite as much as I would have liked so what I will do is look at my plan for tomorrow and I will change things slightly so that they have a little bit more time tomorrow to continue what they were doing today and get a few more ideas... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-2:3)*

The two utterances above suggest that Sophie might have been conceptualising feedback in terms of identifying, primarily, what still needed to be repaired or what was wrong. This in turn could have influenced how she saw her own role in providing it. She seemed to develop a view of herself assuming the main responsibility for what was hindering the students from learning:

*If they haven't learned what I wanted them to learn at the beginning of the lesson, then I haven't done my job and what I have to do now is try to think of as many ways as possible to help them to meet that objective... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-2:10)*

Within this part pertaining to the teacher's account, three interconnected issues can be identified: feedback centred mainly on what was missing, which informed further planning and it influenced how Sophie seemed to interpret her role in addressing it. These elements came up again during her third interview when we were talking about the implications of formative assessment for the lessons observed beyond the scope of a particular episode:

*... You might say... "Oh, we really struggled today lots of them didn't get it – going to repeat this lesson tomorrow." So then everything gets pushed back a day, but the nice thing is you have the ability to do that. There's no point pushing children on, if something is wrong, if they are not getting it then you have to look at your teaching and say, 'Well something I did was wrong, I need*

*to find a different way of doing it.”. (Sophie, St Andrew’s Primary School. Int-3:17)*

Overall, the interview data provide insights into the interplay between the different issues identified during the observations. The teacher reflected upon the difficulties of enacting modelling in a way that aligned with its intended purpose. She referred to the need to cover different aspects of quality writing, but whether the feedback was geared towards correctness or improvement remained unresolved, for it appeared that she wanted to do both. However, from the teacher’s explanations about how she understood her own role in providing feedback so as to overcome the obstacles to learning, it becomes increasingly evident that her paramount concern was to return to and fill persisting knowledge gaps.

#### **4.4.4 Summary**

Sophie reported on a number of ways through which she provided feedback inside the classroom. Observation data illustrated that part of this involved referring to writing quality prior to engagement with the task. Discussing the criteria and modelling were the most common strategies within this teacher account. However, the way classroom interaction was developed, that is, how questions were framed and how the answers were interpreted by the participants within the episodes, suggest she was struggling to resolve certain critical matters. For instance, it appeared to be difficult for her to find a balance between communicating criteria in order to clarify how the task needed to be accomplished and negotiating those criteria that had the purpose of achieving a broader understanding of quality. Furthermore, the boundaries between modelling and providing instructions to pupils appeared to be blurred in the sequences examined.

The analysis of the episodes has enlightened that Sophie’s feedback focused on varied aspects of quality in a piece of work as well as the understanding of the topic involved. The ways in which feedback was enacted within each episode revealed the extent to which this had formative potential. Sometimes she wanted to work on connectives, whilst on other occasions she emphasised more complex features of quality, such as: how to capture the readers’ interest; how to make the writing make sense; or

explaining the structure and purpose of different sort of texts, e.g. during one episode saying ...‘you are telling a story rather than writing a biography’

Sophie adopted the strategy of asking individual students to read out their work and provided verbal comments on strengths and weaknesses. Arguably, corrections and/or improvements were employed in an overlapping way in the observed classroom episodes. The interview data, however, uncovered that feedback was seen as a tool by Sophie for identifying mainly what had not been achieved. This appears to have been driven by her placing emphasis on what the students could not do in terms of learning and her electing to orchestrate the feedback processes.

#### **4.5 The teacher’s approach to written forms of feedback**

A number of key elements can be identified in the ways that Sophie provided written feedback to her students regarding their writing tasks. Some pertained to correcting their work, whilst others were about asking the students to take action towards specific improvements. Both these approaches to assessment reveal what this teacher appeared to consider important in a piece of writing and hence, provide insights into the nature of her feedback messages, which is discussed in more detail below. During interview, Sophie also reported on her beliefs about students’ understanding of what quality meant in a piece of writing.

##### **4.5.1 Focusing on basic errors**

The teacher used a marking scheme as part of a wider strategy in relation to her written forms of feedback. The account she provided covered ‘spelling corrections’ as well as the nature of the content of the writing that was being assessed. Sophie expressed that her concern was not to discourage students who had very weak spelling ability, which led her to deciding to be selective, as she explained:

*...we went through a process of how much do you mark? How much do you say is incorrect? If you have a child who is a very weak speller, do you pick up every spelling mistake? Because that can be disruptive, if you have got so much on their work that is wrong, they find that very difficult. So you have to make a decision as to what you are going to mark and what you are going to ignore... (Sophie, St Andrew’s Primary School. Int-1:1)*

Regarding which, as she described, she came up with a strategy focusing on marking misspelled words only if they were commonly used or familiar to the student and those directly linked to the subject:

*...so, for me, I would mark a spelling wrong, if it was a high frequency word that they should know, or, if it was a subject specific word that they should know. So, for instance, if we are doing Egypt, if they keep spelling Egypt wrong, then you've got to pick that up, because it it's a subject specific word that they should know...(Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-1:1)*

In her interview, the teacher added detail to illustrate how she applied this selective strategy when marking spelling (Int-1:1) and from her description below, some indication as to how she saw this affecting her students learning emerges:

*This lad obviously keeps forgetting the capital letter for Egyptians, but I think possibly by the end of this piece of work he has got it, because we've marked it every time...(Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-1:1)*

In this utterance, the teacher was still talking about how she was focusing on making judgments and emphasising corrections. Sophie appeared to expect that this would guide her pupils to learn from them. In spite of this, the type of feedback did not communicate to the pupil whether she/he is progressing with reference to the learning goal underlying the task.

#### **4.5.2 Feedback related to content**

This subsection explores the ways that Sophie provided feedback using written comments. As she elaborated upon this, the reasoning behind the decisions made emerged and the key dimensions she emphasised were as follows:

- Communicate to the students whether they have met or not met the learning objective:

*I like ... I used to write out that you have met the learning objective, but it takes too long so we just now put "LO met", which she [the student] has. (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary's School. Int-1:2)*

- Give positive information by recognising student effort:

*I like to always say what I think about their writing, whether I think it is great or*



*I think they tried hard or that kind of thing. And I did particularly like the way she had structured sentences – they sounded ... it sounded knowledgeable. It sounded as though she knew what she was writing and she had written it with an understanding. (Sophie, St Andrew Primary's School. Int-1:2)*

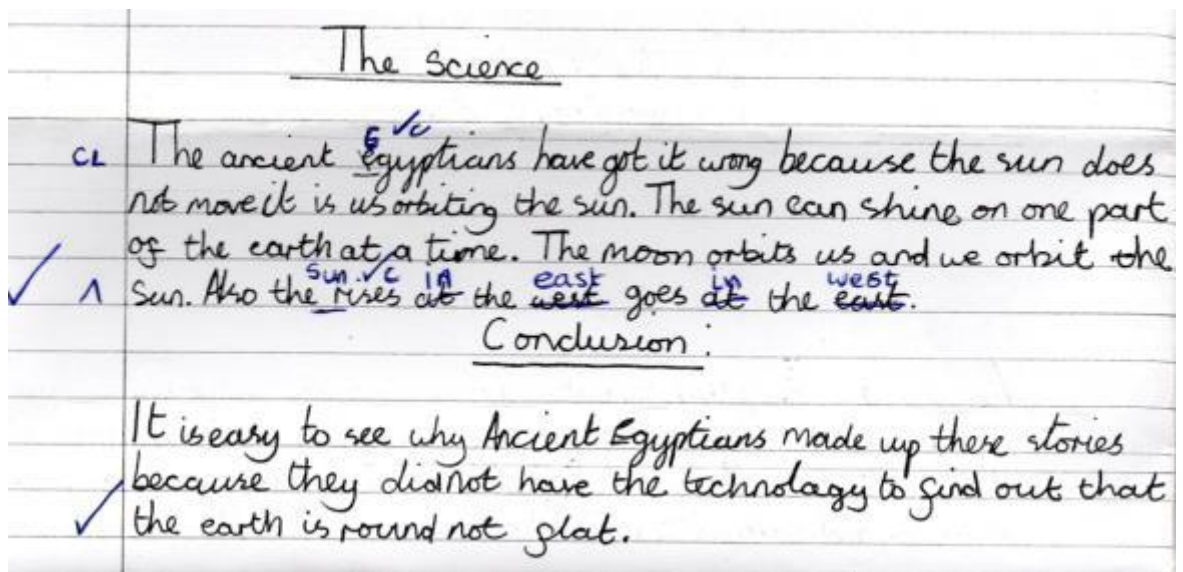
- Seek further actions on the piece of work:

*... with the science bit she hadn't quite got enough in there so, the idea is that I can now ask her to add one more sentence to the science bit and I have given her the words that I want her to include, because if she includes them, she will have included the science I wanted her to include, with the idea of the earth spinning and that's what gives us day and night. (Sophie, St Andrew Primary's School. Int-1:2)*

This last utterance suggests that, the teacher had an implicit 'content-driven' view of English subject teaching. As such, this demonstrates that she considered whether what was written about the topic was accurate was an important aspect to signify quality in a piece of writing. Hence, it would be not sufficient to accomplish the other features described above (see section 4.5.1). This idea is illustrated in the two excerpts below, taken from the students' books. They show a writing task in which the students had to describe the Egyptian belief regarding how the sun moved across the sky and then, to explain the scientific perspective on the same matter. The learning objective included at the outset of the piece of writing was 'To retell a myth and relate it to the science'.

Looking at the teacher's comments within the examples that follow, it can be seen how Sophie adjusted her indications depending on what part of the topic, within the piece of writing, had been misunderstood by an individual child; the science aspect (see figure 1) or the Egyptian myth (see figure 2 2). This shows how she differentiated her feedback about content, according to what each individual pupil had experienced difficulty understanding in her quest to accomplish the learning objective.

**Extract 1: (high ability child)**



**Teacher's comment:**

Great writing [student name],. L.O. met. I really like the way you have structured your sentences.

Can you add one more sentence to the science by explaining how we get day and night. Use these words: 'spins' 'axis' '24 hours'.

**Student's response:**

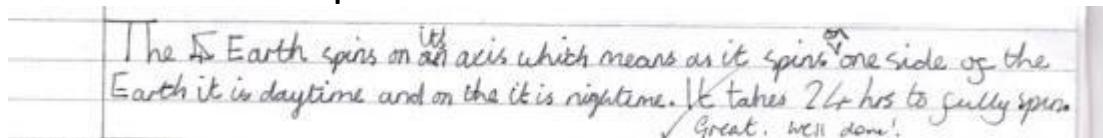
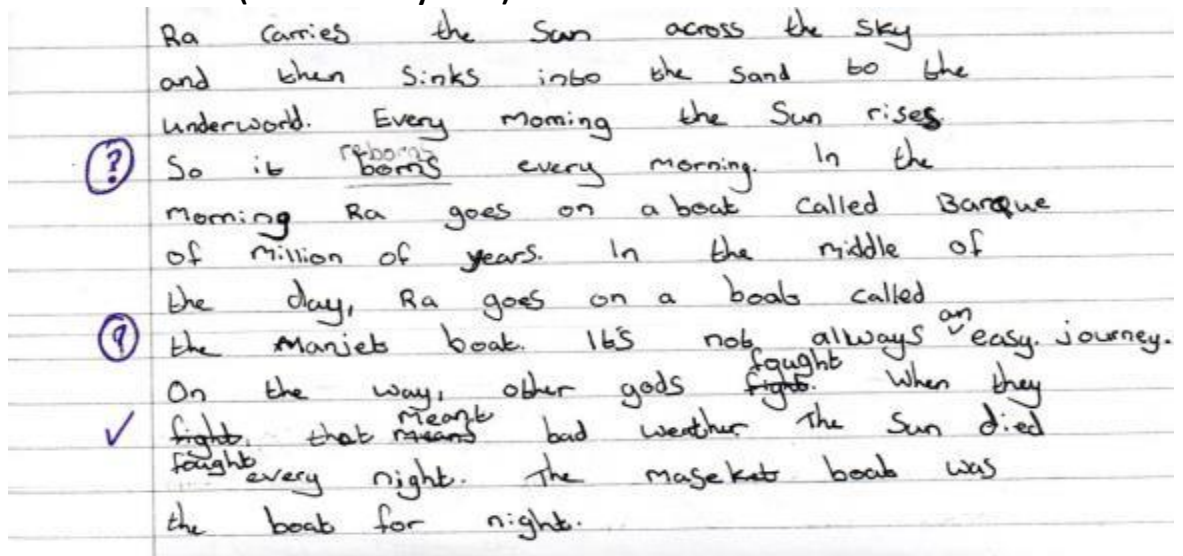


Figure 4.1 Example of a writing task and the feedback provided. Y5 student. Sophie-Class Teacher.

• **Extract 2: (middle ability child)**



**Teacher's comment:**

*Well done [student name], I can see you have tried hard. You had confused one or two details. The Barque of Millions of Years and Manjet boat are the same things, in English and Arabic.*

*Complete this sentence:*

*When the Ancient Egyptians saw the dung beetle rolling a ball of dung they thought ... They ~~was~~ were moving the sun across the sky because the dung looked like the sun.*

*(student's response in green pen)*

Figure 4.2 Example of a writing task and the feedback provided. Y5 student. Sophie-Class Teacher.

Sophie, in her interview, made further reference with regards to the advice on follow-up action given to students ('add a sentence related to...'). She described the different ways of placing emphasis in relation to this specific suggestion, according to whether she considered the students were high, middle or low achievers:

*... You might give words and they have to structure the sentence, you might give the beginning of the sentence and they have to finish it or you give the whole sentence with just a couple of words missing and they have to put those in – depending on the level of the child. (Sophie, St Andrew Primary School. Int-1:3-4)*

Sophie's discussion regarding 'seek further action' was also linked to the issue of how she expected the students to act on her feedback, based on her previous assessment of their capabilities. This notion can also be observed in the comments given in the material selected above, showing that the prompts could vary depending on the level of the child. For instance, a high ability child had to write a sentence using key words, (see figure 4.1), whilst a middle ability one was asked to complete a sentence using the frame provided (see figure 4.2). Both these examples of Sophie's prompts show that she was trying to get the pupils to follow up what they had previously written by adding further text. However, from the reported data it is not possible to ascertain to what extent this feedback was helping the students to grasp the concept of reflecting on the quality in the piece of writing they had produced.

#### 4.5.3 Recognising quality in a piece of writing: what students can do?

Student involvement in the process of marking was another topic that emerged during the interviews. It was brought to the fore that they should be taught to develop self and peer-assessment skills:

*...And unfortunately our children, because this is a fairly new process for us, our children are not yet trained. When you say to them, mark your own work ...you do need to train children in both, self-assessment and peer-assessment... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-1:3)*

This would appear to imply an understanding of what quality work means and recognition of what needs to be done to make improvements. Sophie reported that in her initial attempts at self-assessment, the students judged that some goals had been achieved, but when she monitored this, she could not find any evidence of it in the actual piece of writing. She saw concluded that peer-marking had turned out to be unfocused.

In order to get her students to take the responsibility for reflecting on their own work, Sophie identified key issues, with the first being concerned with to what extent the students understood the learning intention. In this regard, she seemed to believe that there was still a mechanistic view of the learning objective and that the students had not yet grasped the intended goal that underlay specific tasks, hence they could not actively analyse quality in their pieces of writing:

*...The teacher has to model how this is going to happen, what does this look like ? If I assess your piece of work on the learning objective, what am I looking for? Because I think children have got into the habit of writing a learning objective... b u t I still think we haven't quite got to grips with using it. Knowing what the learning objective is, and using that to inform us whether or not we have done a good piece of work. I think there is still a bit of a way to go yet... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int-1:3)*

A second issue highlighted by Sophie pertained to the success criteria as tools that could help the students to internalise the learning goal, which, in her view, was unresolved in many cases. She indicated that within the school they had carried out some innovations in relation to the drafting of the success criteria, which she had shared with her students:

*Now we start, we always start success criteria now with, have I remembered to...? So, it's have I remembered to lay out my letter, put my address on the top right hand corner? Have I remembered to indent my first line of my letter? Have I remembered to sign my letter at the bottom? That kind of thing, so it's clearer for the children... (Sophie, St Andrew Primary's School. Int-1:5-6)*

Nevertheless, she tended to believe that these innovations were not enough and in any case, understanding of the meaning of the success criteria by the pupils had yet to be accomplished:

*... It is not easy, it is not easy for teachers, so it is much harder for children when you say to them, how would you know if you have been successful? And sometimes that takes a little bit of pulling out, because they haven't quite ... they don't know what makes it successful... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int- 1:6-7)*

All in all, in terms of the development of her marking procedures, Sophie had reached the view that her students were not yet able to gauge the quality of their work. This explains why she was of the opinion that before they could engage in self- or peer assessment, they needed to be able to recognise what constitutes a good piece of writing.

#### **4.5.4 Summary**

The analysis of Sophie's approach to written forms of feedback has identified the following dimensions within her work.

Part of her feedback related to correcting basic errors, specifically spelling. There were a number of decisions she had taken that guided her actions on this matter. She was concerned about not discouraging some of her students who were weak spellers, which led her to being selective about what to pick up in their writing. Consequently, she picked out those misspelled words linked to the topic at hand and those frequently used. For, she took the view that the pupils were more likely to learn from their mistakes, if they were guided to correct only those that were major writing errors and those that would help improve content.

Sophie developed the practice of devising written comments, the purposes of which were to: communicate with the students whether they had met the learning objective, recognise what had been done well and to advise follow up action, e.g. *'add a sentence related to...'* A view of what 'good work' meant in English emerged, whereby she decided to focus her feedback on conceptual understanding and when drafting comments, she drew upon her previous assessment knowledge of the child's ability level. The students were expected to act on their teacher's comments, thus being able to make the appropriate improvements in their piece of writing. However, what could not be explained yet by relying on this set of data was to what extent the feedback was helping the students to make improvements and to reflect more widely on their work.

The actual understanding of the learning objective and the success criteria had not yet been assimilated by the pupils at the time of the data collection phase within this study. Sophie believed that the students were not skilled enough to perform self and peer-assessment. She also perceived that they were not able to recognise quality within their piece of writing, making it more difficult to communicate those aspects of quality to their peers or to their teacher. Thus, from her perspective, the scope of the feedback strategies she employed did not raise the matter of students engaging in active reflection about their own work.

## Chapter 5

### Steve, Class Teacher, St. Albert's Primary School

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the main components of the school policy on feedback so as to contextualise Steve's experience in the classroom. Next, general information about his work on feedback and formative assessment is provided. This is followed by the results section comprising several subsections, the first of which refers to observation data and presents the analysis of selected classroom episodes where there was potential for feedback to occur. This is complemented by the analysis of follow up interviews aimed at gathering the reflections of the teacher regarding his assessment practices in his lessons. Subsequently, there is a summary of the main insights that emerged from this participant teacher's feedback whilst engaging in spoken interaction. Finally, Steve's approach to written forms of feedback is discussed by drawing upon the analysis of the data collected from semi-structured interviews and examples of marking in students' books.

#### 5.2 Assessment Policy St. Albert's Primary School

The school has a formal written assessment policy that includes principles and suggestions within three main areas: Assessment *for* learning, assessment *of* learning and the evaluation of the agreed policies. The ARG's' definition (2002) on Assessment *for* learning (AFL) has been adopted. In the school's document it is described as a process of seeking and interpreting evidence to be used by students and their teachers to identify where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

Regarding 'Assessment *of* Learning', this is defined as a process which is used to make judgements about pupils' attainments. Within this perspective, the policy introduces guidelines for setting targets and keeping records related to pupils' achievements. The information derived from these procedures should be analysed so as to make changes

in planning and actions that will improve teaching and learning inside the classroom. To determine whether the policy was being implemented an annual cycle of assessment was established. The document provides descriptions of what is needed to carry out procedures appropriately, covering: planning, monitoring, recording and reporting. Furthermore, the policy explicitly states the role within this process of different members of the staff (class teacher; inclusion officer; assessment coordinator; head teacher and subject coordinators).

While I have mentioned the three different components within the school assessment policy, in the discussion that follows, I focus on 'Assessment for learning' and next, I illustrate the key elements that guide its implementation.

- **AFL must be on-going and integral to the teaching**

The policy stresses that an appropriate classroom environment is a vital condition for successful Assessment *for* Learning. This should be such that it helps the students to enjoy, develop confidence about and reflecting on their learning. Opportunities should be created for sharing with the students the learning objectives and success criteria, such that they can be actively involved in this process. If the learning objective of a particular lesson is not accomplished, then, the planning and teaching needs to be modified.

Questioning, observing and discussion are assessment strategies that apply to all lessons. The intended purpose of these practices is so that the teachers will focus on how learning is progressing, where improvements can be made and to identify the next steps to be taken. The policy also points out that, for these strategies to be effective, the pupils should be engaged in a day to day assessment process, which is denominated as 'assessment in partnership' (Assessment Policy document: 5).

- **Feedback on learning**

The school policy first states that the most effective feedback is oral and immediate. It then explains the purpose and nature of feedback. It should communicate to the pupils their strengths and weaknesses revealed in their work as well as providing suggestions for improvement. It should involve referring to the learning objective and



success criteria, thus not just being about presentation, punctuation, spelling or quantity. It is also recommended that written feedback should be given in the form of comments, rather than grades or marks and that the students should be encouraged to think for themselves about what is needed to enhance their work.

The use of the strategy 'Closing the Gap Prompts (three stars and a wish)' is promoted (policy document: 5). The three stars inform the student where the learning objective has been met, whilst the wish refers to an area that still needs to be worked out. The latter should be carried out using three types of closing the gaps prompts, namely: The *reminder prompt*, which pertains to reiterating the learning objective; the *scaffold prompt*, which entails putting questions or direct suggestions; and the *example prompt*, which pertains to offering a model that the students use as a guide to improving their work.

- **Curricular targets and the formative use of summative data**

The school policy advocates the use of curricular targets within the assessment for learning approach. A variety of sources are drawn upon, including: analysis of the students' work, discussions with the children, teacher assessments and test performance. Curricular targets are considered to be the tools for identifying areas for improvement, with assessment information being used to make a positive impact on learning and teaching inside the classroom. To achieve this purpose, the policy advises that evidence be derived from formative feedback as well as from summative data. The students should be engaged in activities that enable them to: structure their own revision through self-and-peer-assessment as 'critical friends'; set questions for each other; and develop their own marking scheme to aid their understanding of what high quality outcomes mean. To summarise, the purpose of this description is to show the main principles and some strategies addressed in the school policy within its assessment *for* learning approach. I have mainly focused on those issues than can serve to contextualise Steve's feedback practices.

### **5.3 Steve-Class Teacher**

Steve combined his role as one of the school leaders with the teaching of Y5 Literacy lessons. He put forward the view that teaching should involve helping students to take

ownership of their learning. At the time this research was carried out, he was participating in a project aimed at developing students' capabilities as: self-managers, effective participants, resourceful thinkers, independent enquirers etc. For Steve, his formative assessment practices are all oriented towards his students acquiring these skills. This first requires understanding of the goals:

*Because the whole thing is a journey, isn't it? It's a process and if they are not clear about what they have got to do to improve then they can't improve. And it is like I said to these kids, they have got the ability, they are very bright kids but if they don't know what they've got to do they can't do it. (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-1:1)*

Subsequently, the student can increasingly assume a more active role in analysing their own work:

*So, the whole idea of this is instead of a normal situation where it is like, okay, I've looked at your work and I've analysed it and you need to write connectives or you need to include speech marks – that's fine, that's good teaching. But if you can get the kids to do that themselves all of a sudden it's the next level, isn't it? ... (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-1:1)*

This idea of the role that should be played by the students in the learning and feedback processes came across a great deal throughout this teacher's account, shaping, in part, his approach to providing feedback.

## **5.4 Steve's enactment of feedback practices inside the classroom**

### **5.4.1 Feedback before and during engagement with the task**

This subsection reports Steve's approach to providing feedback to his students through analysis of classroom episodes. The selected extracts were ones that offered the potential for students to explore what quality involves in a piece of work. For, if they could develop a sense of quality the opportunities to improve their work might be widened, which in turn would be an indication that feedback was taking place (Sadler, 1989).

I have taken these episodes from different lessons, with the focus being on the 'Discussion-content' phase, within the interactional context of whole class-teaching. They either entail the teacher modelling criteria for writing different sort of texts

or the students formulating questions during the process of enactment of the activity.

The episodes under consideration seem to share the common purpose of Steve monitoring to what extent the students understood the criteria before and during engagement with a writing task. Based on this premise, the analysis focuses on the nature of the exchanges, trying to elucidate whether they had to do with providing pupils with prompts of what needed to be done in order to complete the task or whether the intention was the enhancement of the quality of future work (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003).

Observation of the interaction between Steve and his students during classroom discourse can reveal whether what was taking place promoted or constrained feedback opportunities. Accordingly, in noting how questions were framed and the ways in which he seemed to have interpreted the students' questions and their responses, provides understanding of what was elicited (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Leung, 2004) and how feedback manifested itself within Steve's lessons.

As with the previous participant teacher, in order to introduce the analysis of each selected piece of data, first, an outline of the lesson observed is provided. It considers a description of the main phases with the specific aims and the activities carried out. This is intended to contextualise the issues that shape the interaction within the episodes that are drawn upon for examination.

- *Lesson context concerning Episode 6*

This pertains to the fifth lesson observed in Steve's class on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014 (file:711-0111) and the learning objective was '*I can write a balanced argument*'. Within the Introduction-phase, Steve and his class recapped the work they had carried out since the previous lesson regarding the vocabulary conventions of a discussion text. The pupils had constructed sentences using these words (however, nevertheless, therefore, etc), which they were asked to rehearse orally ... 'Right, so we are thinking about those arguments for and against rationing of chocolate- do you remember? I wonder, if one person would be able to tell us a sentence with the word despite?'... [00:01:56]. Four students participated in these exchanges by using different connectives (S9, S10, S23, S28). An example of a student response was

‘although chocolate is tasty, it is full of sugar’. Steve commented on each of the heard statements and wrote out those sentences on the white board, whilst the pupils did so in their books.

Then, the teacher and his class engaged in shared writing, which consisted of Steve modelling some examples of arguments for and against through collecting ideas from pupils. There was an overarching question ‘should chocolate be rationed once a year on your birthday?’ and also three chosen categories around which the arguments needed to be organised. The categories were related to economy, health, and free choice. They started to devise the model by considering first the economy aspect, which Steve marked by saying: ‘Okay...we were looking at economy, weren’t we? S17...[00:10:18]. The interaction that follow this prompt revolved around the impact of chocolate rationing on the industry. In the first part of the discussion, the likelihood that factories might close down and workers could lose their jobs was put forward, whilst in the second part this notion was challenged. To illustrate this part of the exchanges I have selected Episode 6 that is analysed below:

- *Episode 6: what did we say about the birthday business?*

The following extract was taken from lesson 5 (file: 711 0111; on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014) and it is preceded by the lesson context outlined above.

1. T: ... [*“However”*], what did we say about the birthday business? S4? What did we say about the birthday business and the chocolate factories? Do you remember how many people’s birthday is it every day?
2. S4: Two hundred thousand.
3. T: Yes. [ *“However, 200 ”*]- I am going to do it in words – two hundred thousand people have a birthday. [*“However, each day two hundred thousand people have a birthday and so chocolate”*] ... Do you remember this word? Manufacturers? What does that mean? What does it mean to manufacture something, S12?
4. S12: People who make ...

5. T: Make, that's right, it means to make. [ "*Could still sell lots of products*"]  
Good. So, that is our economy. Yes?
6. S: Instead of two hundred thousand you could put approximately ...
7. T: Very good, there was that word we used – look at that, top man  
[ "*Approximately*" ], it means nearly, it means roughly.
8. S: It is estimated approximately.
9. T: Yes, it is estimated – that's another one, okay. *In addition to this*, no ... okay.  
*In addition to the effect on the economy, experts believe* – what do experts  
believe health-wise? We have done this let me think, S27...  
*(the interaction continued with a focus on experts' opinions about  
chocolate and health. When the model example had been completed, the class  
engaged in another activity, which consisted of creating more sentences to  
prepare their own balanced arguments, Steve provided them with cards  
that include the connectives pupils could use to prepare their writing for the  
upcoming lesson).*

Steve started with ...*what did we say about the birthday business?* (line 1), which seemed to elicit recall and description rather than discussion on the matter. The question was then addressed to a specific pupil, and it was narrowed down to...*how many people's birthday is it every day?* and S4 provided an immediate and accurate response (line 2). Having established this numerical data, the teacher was concerned with writing down this idea on the whiteboard as an argument that would imply that the chocolate factories still could continue functioning. This notion was not further explored and instead, Steve focused on checking the meaning of the word manufacturer with another child-S12- (lines 3-4). In line 5, Steve made an evaluative comment confirming S12 had answered correctly and then by the statement ... '*So that is our economy*'... he signalled his intention of closing the sequence and moving on to a different part of the modelling process. Despite this, another student made an unprompted suggestion about the use of the adverb '*approximately*' (line 6). Steve chose to evaluate this contribution positively, and seemed to praise it given that the intonation in his voice was very enthusiastic. Then, he introduced a connective within the model example: '*roughly*' (line 7). In addition, a

second pupil offered a synonym for the word '*approximately*' (line 8). The teacher noted and acknowledged it, but this time decided to continue with his line of inquiry and thus, proceed with the modelling. This boundary was marked by ... 'okay. *In addition to this*'... (line 9) now trying to incorporate the experts' standpoint.

It could be said that, the pupil's unsolicited contribution, although a small act of intervention, reflected that despite Steve seeming determined to structure the modelling process as planned, his actions were not completely uncontested. Whilst the teacher posed questions that were closed in nature and an instructional tenor characterised the exchanges, the students felt confident in making uninvited suggestions. In terms of formative assessment, this suggests that both Steve and the pupils were participating in deciding what quality meant. My observation data indicate that this type of interaction was not uncommon and this is further illustrated by drawing on a few lines of a different episode, which I quote below. The transcript comes from lesson 6 (file: 711 0112; on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014), when the teacher and students were discussing the structure for the writing of a balanced argument:

6. S: Can we do... [Unclear: 00:14:11].
7. T: No, I just want you to write this now – this is your sustained writing. So, you do this without my help but you've got the help from your success criteria, you have got the structure on the board here, introduction, arguments, second, third, fourth paragraph and then the fifth paragraph is the conclusion.
8. S: if like, if there's one for *for* and then they're called health, economy and choice and *against*?
9. T: You can, you can do it that way if you want to. I don't mind. You can either do all the *fors* and then all the *againsts* or you can do the *for* and *against*. If you do the *for* and *against* in the same paragraph, it is very much easier to put on the *other hand* and *however* and stuff like that, okay? But listen, this is your writing you choose how you want to do it, okay?
10. S: Okay.

In line 7, Steve reinforced a structure previously modelled in order to develop different paragraphs for the writing task. File 711 0112 shows that they had produced the arguments - *for* and *against* - which were concerned with '*health*', '*economy*' and '*free choice*'. However, in the above exchange one pupil asked the teacher if the arguments could be organized in a different way (line 8). This question explicitly involved an alternative proposition to the Steve's model. In line 9, the teacher's reaction seems to show him having some reservations, thinking that the student's idea would give her/him fewer chances for using the language of discussion and he warned the pupil about this. However, in the end Steve stressed the pupils' ownership of their writing- task and conveyed this notion to this particular student.

All in all, in the main episode examined here, the teacher praised the student's suggestion, but this act was not used as an opportunity to increase participation (Black, et al., 2003). In the added extract, the pupil's idea was also accepted and yet a follow up could have been introduced asking for clarification (Black et al., 2003), which would have provided the opportunity for an extended discussion. From these observations, at first hand it would seem that Steve's feedback primarily focused on reminding the pupils what arguments should be included within the piece of writing and the structure to follow. However, this assertion does not reflect the whole story of these sequences. It would appear that Steve assumed that the understanding of the argument itself had already been achieved in a previous phase of this lesson, as he often spoke in past tense *...what did we say about the birthday business?...(line1)* or... *'there was that word we used'...* (line 7). Thus, on this occasion, the purpose seemed to be to put all the elements together and to make them explicit for students to remember what needed to be done in order to complete the task. This suggests that the teacher used formative assessment not only for conveying task criteria, but also to provide a sense of continuous exploration of quality through accepting the students' unbidden initiations observed in this interaction. Their unrequested interjections seemed to show that they were confident in expressing their ideas in front of the class.

- Lesson context regarding Episode 7

The sixth lesson observation that took place in Steve's class on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014 (file:711 0112) was also the second Literacy session on the same day that involved the learning objective '*I can write a balanced argument*'. This lesson, in particular, was dedicated to what Steve called sustained writing, which pertained to pupils working individually on their own pieces of work. Which meant that once this task was completed the teacher would collect the books for marking. Before starting, pupils were given a couple more minutes to practice their sentences already devised [00:02:57]. Steve then distributed stickers that outlined both the learning intention and the success criteria stated for this piece of writing, with every child putting them on a clean page in their exercise books [00:08:35]. The success criteria contained in the stickers referred to 'use the vocabulary despite, although, however, nevertheless, in my opinion, therefore, on the other hand, in my conclusion'. The teacher clarified or reiterated to his class that in using those words they would show they had applied the vocabulary of a balanced argument. Next, he added other success criteria on the whiteboard: 'To write in the third person, except in the conclusion; do the introduction; then do the arguments –for and against, they are for economy, health and free choice; then write the conclusion, you can put 'I' in the conclusion'[00:11.37]. Subsequently, time was allocated for writing [00:11.37] [00:57.27]. During this activity, the pupils had the opportunity to develop and strengthen their work as they kept posing questions to the teacher to the extent that they were progressively dealing with their task, that is to say, when their work was still in progress. At the same time, Steve was moving around the pupils' tables to support them, if needed. When he identified a child presenting some difficulties, he used that information as a point to discuss within the whole class context. The issues addressed were regarding the structure and the sort of arguments to introduce. Both aspects are illustrated in the Episode 7, which I have singled out for finer analysis below.



- *Episode 7: Can you see, S6, how I have done it?*

This episode was extracted from lesson 6 Writing-phase (file: 711 0112; on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014). As outlined in the preceding lesson context, this interaction took place during the process of engagement with the task. The sequences below show that when Steve observed student's work, he realised that S6 was devising a table separating the arguments *for* and *against*, in the form of a list, but not connecting different notions related to chocolate rationing in a cohesive way. This led to him deciding to intervene to illustrate what was actually expected of the pupil, by drawing his/her attention to the model on the whiteboard:

1. T: Look, you will say ... [*Some people believe that if we ration chocolate, that the economy will suffer and chocolate factories will close down and the workers will have to receive benefits. However, each day approximately two hundred thousand people have a birthday and so chocolate manufacturers can still sell lots of products and make lots of money*"]. That's my *for* and *against* for the economy. Does that make sense, S6? So, that's my first argument done. I have got my introduction, first argument. Now I am going to say, [*however, scientists have proved that if we eat too much sugar and fat, which is a thing we get from chocolate, this could lead to obesity and ill health. On the other hand, other people or other experts, think that if we have chocolate just once a week, it won't do us any harm, and diabetics need it to keep healthy*"]. That's paragraph number two done. Can you see, S6, how I have done it? Yes, are you sure? Yes?  
(S6 nodded)

The exchange does not demonstrate whether this further clarification helped S6 in building a picture of quality, as she/ he just nodded and even the teacher seemed doubtful whether understanding had been achieved, since he added: *are you sure?*. However, no further action took place geared towards probing this uncertainty. While this specific act of feedback was addressed to one particular child, it happened in front of the whole class, which appeared to stimulate other children to formulate questions

that required the teacher's attention and then, the sequence continued:

2. S: And oral health?
3. T: Oral health, yes. Actually, I haven't put that down, have I? Oh yes I have, oh no, I haven't put oral health down. So oral health, I will put dentist there as well.
4. S: Can we do I think...
5. T: No, you can't do I
6. S: Only ours?
7. T: Our, no. No, you would do what I have said, experts, scientists, people.
8. S: Does addiction go under free choice?
9. T: That's your argument. Is it free choice if you are addicted to it? I would say, no, it's not. I am not sure if that would be free choice. I was watching a programme about drugs the other day and this woman had chosen the drugs over her child. At the time she was in pieces, crying, "I want my child back." She's tried to stop taking the drugs but then the addiction was so bad that she just craved and craved and in the end the drugs won. So, it is not free choice if you are really addicted to something, it is not free choice. That's not really the argument to make [...] One last question.

Three questions were posed by different students, with the first being a prompt that one argument was missing from the model drawn up by the teacher (line 2). The second reflected that the pupil was unclear whether to use the first or third person in her/ his piece of writing (line 4). Regarding which, the teacher gave a brief explicit answer, such that the student would need to interpret the words scientists and experts as examples of the third person (line 7). The third query pertained to an aspect of the '*free choice*' category argument, for which Steve provided an enlarged explanation (line 9). He posed another question... *Is it free choice if you are addicted to it?* ...which could have triggered further discussion involving the whole class on the meaning of the word addiction. Instead, the teacher chose to make an evaluative comment ... '*I would say, no, it's not*'.... Next, he described an example from a TV programme related to drug addiction to illustrate his position on the matter at length and finally, appeared to want to close these exchanges by calling for just one more question. Two students participated in the last part of the episode:

10. S: Could you say people would take it for granted?
11. T: Yes. S19?
12. S19: I have got two things to say.
13. T: Go on then.
14. S 19: First, what ... can we use our literacy books to help us with our work?
15. T: No, sorry.
16. S 19: And, I learnt from my dad that too much sugar can weaken your bladder as well.
17. T: Okay, put that in – that's really good. [00:22:09]

*(The writing activity continued and more questions were put by individual students, that referred to the amount of paragraphs to include (S2) [00:23:17], or whether each sort of arguments should be separated by sub-headings (S17) [00:35:32]).*

In line 10, one student wanted to confirm the way in which she/ he drafted a sentence and that was accepted by Steve (line 11). S19 announced she/ he would like to speak and the teacher encouraged her/him to carry on. This pupil asked whether a particular resource could be used when carrying out the writing task, but this was refused (lines 12-15). Then, he/she shared further information learned away from school relating to the excessive intake of sugar, which was constructive regarding the arguments about the topic of chocolate rationing. Consequently, Steve confirmed that this idea should be incorporated into the writing and ended the interaction with an evaluative move... *'that's really good'...* (line 17).

On the whole, the episode illustrated a number of issues at play. The teacher collected information about how his students were approaching the task, and in the ways he conducted the interaction, show that his role in guiding how the task should be undertaken took centre stage. Nevertheless, it is precisely because this interaction was happening whilst the pupils were engaging with the task that feedback was offered without delay. This gave room for students to make inquiries about the production of their own piece of writing and to some extent, opened up the potential for exploring issues of writing quality. This can be seen as responsive feedback when the learning process is actually taking place (Black et al., 2003; Black & William, 2012).

Furthermore, the classes of moves within the teaching exchanges, namely, initiation (I), response (R) and follow-up (F) (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992), were slightly modified in that the pupils led the interaction by asking questions and the teacher provided the responses to them. The follow up took different forms, from being evaluative, as the teacher accepted or rejected what would be appropriate to incorporate or not into the piece of writing. At the same time, Steve also seemed to be concerned with explaining carefully to one student why a suggested argument did not hold (line 9) or, as at another stage, encouraging a pupil to use an idea that had not been discussed as part of the lesson (lines 16-17). These sorts of acts could be considered as signal of the teacher's intention of allowing for the negotiation of quality (Sadler, 1989; Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

#### **5.4.2 Feedback on students' work before the completion of the final product**

In this section, I examine episodes that serve to illustrate another dimension of Steve's feedback practices. They were selected from different lessons, specifically, within the 'Revision work' phase in the context of whole class teaching. The extracts were concerned with activities in which a number of students presented pieces of their work and the teacher made immediate oral comments regarding each. On some occasions they did so orally in groups, whilst on others they did so in pairs, whereas individual contributions were the least common form of presentation.

The actions within the episodes under examination appeared to be devised, on the one hand, to help students recognise what still needed to be done in order to improve their work. On the other hand, the teacher seemed to be aiming at getting an idea of how the students were approaching the task and hence, was monitoring their progress at a stage preceding the completion of the final product. Given these purposes appear to be what Steve intended, this provided the opportunity to determine whether these interactions were focused on supporting the learners' understanding of quality (Black *et al.*, 2003) or whether these actions were driven by some other kind of reference point, for instance, to ensure the task was on target (Torrance & Pryor, 1998)

The nature of these exchanges was subtly different to those described in subsection 5.4.1., for whilst the question & answer structure of the discourse was still present, the teacher's evaluative comments on the pupils' pieces of work were particularly prevalent among these episodes. It is contended that by considering this set of verbal interactions and the messages conveyed to students will show whether feedback was oriented towards correcting or was aimed at encouraging them to take further action (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam 2009, 2012).

- Lesson context relating to Episode 8

This pertained to the second lesson observed in Steve's class on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 (file 711 0065). Before the Introduction-phase took place, the teacher and his class spent time planning a charity activity, the presentation that Y5 was to make during assembly the following Friday, amongst others business issues.

The learning objectives were specified, according to the main activities carried out, 'To explore and critically analyse the illustrations of the story', 'To order pictures to create a story', and 'To orally tell the story with confidence'. To achieve these purposes, the class had been given large copies of illustrations from the book *The Way Home* by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers (without text), being asked to arrange the pictures to make a story board and then being expected to devise their own story. Steve explained to his class that when looking at the pictures they should ask some questions themselves 'do they tell a story?', 'How do these pictures make you feel?' 'What sort of story if they do, do they tell?', 'Are they in any sort of order, or can you make them into any order?' and 'is there a theme running through the pictures that is sustained?' [00:16:38].

The task was organised in mixed ability table groups, each table had a chairperson whose role was to make sure that everybody got a fair go within the discussion. Steve encouraged the pupils to use the dictionary to find words that would help them to describe the pictures better and to express what feelings they were producing in them, thereby building up appropriate vocabulary. During the activity, Steve moved

around the tables helping pupils with their work and alternating this feedback with explanations to the whole class, for instance, he was concerned to reinforce the idea of portraying more precisely what effects the pictures were having or the mood they were creating [00:32:09]. When the pupils had their pictures arranged according to the sequence they had thought up and had agreed upon their story, they rehearsed their parts in preparation for a reading to the whole class.

The Revision work-phase of the lesson came next, where Steve asked different teams to come out to the front of the class in order to present their work, which they did holding the photos in their hands and standing in a line. In this way, each member of the group was expected to contribute her/his part within the sequence. Five different groups took turns to relate their stories and Episode 8 that I have selected below for examination illustrates specifically the presentation of group number one.

- *Episode 8: ...One word to describe how it makes you feel...*

The extract of the transcript below comes from lesson 2, 'Revision work-phase' (file 711 0065; 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2013) and it is shaped by the lesson context delineated above.

1. [T00:44:35]: ... there's no right or wrong answer whatever the story is it's the story you've made. Okay, the first of all those pictures, one word to describe how it makes you feel.
2. S5: This picture makes me feel sad.
3. T: Sad, now that's a word it's okay but one word right, my little boy says I feel sad, that means so many different things, you're in year five- sad- here's a few choices from a little bit sad to very, very sad.
4. S6: This picture makes me feel grief-stricken.
5. T: Oh that's very sad, grief stricken, okay, start with your story.
6. S7: Well first off the boy is in a wrecked kitchen, and a fierce dog bursts into the kitchen and grabs the boy's cat.

7. T: Okay, so it's a wrecked kitchen I like the word wrecked, but I'm going to write some vocabulary down here. [*Wrecked, fierce*] he grabbed the boy's cat? Brilliant, well not brilliant if you're the cat, how does it make you feel?
8. S8: Well this one makes me feel miserable.
9. T: Miserable- good boy.
10. S9: After that the boy is searching for the cat in his kitchen and in the garbage as well.
11. S10: The boy runs after the cat and then the boy is trying to find the cat up the tree.
12. T: How does the boy feel?
13. S10: A bit scared?
14. T: Scared maybe anxious? Yes-scared-anxious.
15. S11: Distraught.
16. T: Distraught- that's a wonderful word, is distraught on here? It's not, that's a lovely one. Okay, next.
17. S12: This bit is the bit where I'm quite relieved, so the boy found the cat and the cat just ran ahead of him to the house. And then...  
*(The teacher put a few more questions until he was able to get the student to explain how the story ended)*
18. T: So how's the cat now?
19. S12: Safe.
20. [T: 00:48:51] Safe, lovely so there was quite a lot of scary pictures and powerful pictures, but at the end the cat feels safe and he got his cat back. Give him a round of applause, well done.

Steve started the activity by trying to convey to the students that the task would not be judged as right or wrong, but rather, the focus should be on how they determined the direction of the story, which was their own choice. Following this, he asked them to present their work by describing the effects that the pictures had on them (line 1). The teacher's intention was also to monitor the use of vocabulary in that he conjured up images related to a scary setting and the children volunteered appropriate words, which he built upon. Lines 2 to 4 illustrate this, where S6 offers the

expression *'grief stricken'* as opposed to *'sad'*, which was accepted as a better way to depict the mood or feeling that emerged from the first part of the story.

Having stated his double purpose of sequencing the story and adding key words or vocabulary, the teacher signalled the actual start of this first group presentation (line 5). The interaction illustrated how these two elements were combined in terms of Steve's feedback focus. However, he seemed to be more concerned with the second aim and provided positive evaluative comments each time a member of the team used more proper words for describing the scene, as in line 7: ... *'["Wrecked, fierce"] he grabbed the boy's cat? -Brilliant'...*; line 9: ... *'miserable-good boy'...*; or line 16: ... *'Distraught -that's a wonderful word'...*

The sequence of the storyboard itself received few comments from Steve throughout the transcript. The reason why this happened could have been that he considered the succession of the scenes presented in lines 6, 10, 11, 12 and 17 as adequate. It would appear he just wanted to make sure the students properly described the end of the story and he asked for clarification regarding this as follows ... *'So how's the cat now?'...* (line 18),

to which S12 responded ... *'safe'...* (line 19), showing the relevant illustration to support her/ his answer. The general judgment provided by Steve when closing the interaction reflected that he was pleased with how this storyboard had turned out (line 20) in that he used positive expressions and called on the rest of the class to applaud the group.

Next, I provide a brief segment of a transcript related to the second group's oral presentation (file: 711 0065; on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2013). The exchanges can serve as subtle contrast to the previous episode, as they give an account of the role of feedback where the sequence of the story did not go well:

14. [T: 00:51:50] Ok S14. So he's crawling somewhere dark, S15? (*the members of the group moved around S15, whispering something*) You guys you're standing in a circle now you should be in a line, facing the front please [...] -Did you not discuss this at your table?



15. S15: We did but now we have to change it.
  16. T: Hmmm- how does it make you feel S15 the whole story?
  17. S15: It makes me feel quite downcast.
  18. T: Downcast that's a good word, well done. And S16, tell us about your pictures?
  19. S16: Well he has hit the cat and he's running across the road to get to his house but while he's doing that he finds gangsters are standing right in front of his home.
  20. T: Oh dear, how's he feeling there?
  21. S16: He's feeling frightened.
  22. T: Good boy is that how your story ends is it?
  23. S16: To be continued.
  24. [T: 00:53:09] To be continued, yes two ninety-nine for episode two (*teacher smiled*). That's a real cliffhanger isn't it thank you very much, okay sit yourselves down.
- (Within subsequent interactions four more teams presented their work; Steve provided verbal feedback to each one; until he signalled the end of the lesson, telling the pupils to preserve the pictures and their notes, which they would need for the writing activity in the next lesson [01:03:42]).*

S15 did not provide one part of the sequence and the teacher picked up on this problem by asking to the whole group *...Did you not discuss this at your table?...(line 14)*. Once again, Steve was speaking in past tense, taking the students back to what seem to be a piece of teaching that had been delivered in relation to the writing of the storyboard. After the group huddled together in conversation, one pupil said they understood what was required, but they realized that something in their storyboard was wrong and needed modification (line15). Steve decided not to explore further this specific difficulty and instead, pronounced an indirect expression: *...‘Hmmm’...*, which could be interpreted as evaluative, but it also could be seen as a hint that they should try again with that section of their work (line 16). Then, he shifted the emphasis of the inquiry towards the use of vocabulary, with a question addressed to the same child who had offered the explanation and this time she/

he was given positive feedback (line 18). Subsequently, the teacher requested another member of the group to carry on describing her/ his part of the sequence using the pictures (lines 18-23). At the end of this extract Steve highlighted as a strength that the end of the story remained at suspense, but he also said ...‘two ninety-nine for episode two’... (line 24) which seemed to imply a judgment regarding that the work exhibited needed to be improved.

Broadly, the extracts reviewed in this section do enlighten us about what feedback can entail. Some of it regarded how to expand the pupils’ vocabulary around the topic of a scary setting and the sequencing of a storyboard. The nature of the interactions illustrated that the teacher was simultaneously attempting to assess individuals as well as the different groups’ work and so he swiftly moved from one students’ response to another through his questioning. As a result, the line of inquiry was not extended by inviting the rest of the class to comment on their peers’ work.

However, the fact that the transcript did not show evidence of contributions being made by pupils on their peers’ work, it does not imply that the balance of this interaction was towards correctness rather than the exploration of quality. Indeed, the interactions indicate that the teacher’s intentions went beyond simply ensuring the task was on target. The teacher and his students seemed to share a common understanding of what was going on. The last extract reflects that Steve had identified issues that the pupils needed support, within that, he responded through the use of an underlying evaluative move (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). This was followed by him directing the children to re-engage with a strategy they had received instruction about. Thus, the message conveyed by Steve seemed to be that the pupils would have a chance to try again. In sum, these actions suggest that feedback had to do with Steve’s own theory of what needed to be learned.

By revisiting the segment of transcript from lesson 6 (file:711 0112; on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014), in the previous section, it can be seen that Steve explained to the class what had been done in terms of organizing the arguments for writing on the topic of ‘*chocolate rationing*’. After a student’s proposition of an alternative structure, Steve interjected ‘*But listen, this is your writing you choose how you want to do it, okay?*’ So, in a way, the teacher signalled the desire for the pupil to have a go and

realise for himself the enactment of his ideas. This is another example, from the data, that is indicative of the link between Steve's notion of how the student learnt and his feedback practice.

Overall, my classroom observation data gave the impression that Steve, in various ways, integrated the feedback within his teaching activities. He tried to provide scaffolding in order to get the students to internalise some structures and strategies to solve problems. James (2006) has pointed out that when classroom assessment is enacted in this way it is aligning with the cognitive-constructivist theories of learning. Thus, I believe that part of Steve's approach brought this cognitive dimension into his feedback practices.

Moreover, the episodes as a whole displayed that the pupils took part either by asking questions or making suggestions related to the writing task that was being discussed. On some occasions the students' ideas comprised alternative propositions and therefore, they were different from the examples already given by the teacher as being of quality and yet, still acceptable to him. These findings support the view that criteria should not be completely fixed (Sadler, 1989, 2007, 2010; Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001; Black et al., 2003) and that their negotiation should be continuous throughout the learning task. By not exerting role of the final arbiter of quality (James, 2006), Steve's feedback practices have some resemblances with the sociocultural theories of learning.

#### **5.4.3 Teacher's perspective**

In this section I draw on interview data in order to report some reflections from the teacher regarding his assessment practices during his lessons. Steve was interviewed formally and informally at different stages. On one occasion, this was in the form of a brief post-lesson conversation (file:711-0138; on 6th November, 2013) whilst a formal interview lasting around 20 minutes was carried out on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.

Two recurrent themes were identified from Steve's accounts, the first of which concerned the relevance of talk in fostering students' learning and to collect evidence of that learning was taking place, whereas the second pertained to some insights about shared learning and the implications of this for the feedback process.

- **Talk**

During the interview, when commenting on lesson 5 from which I took the episode 6: *what did we say about the birthday business?* (See section 5.4.1), Steve highlighted the importance of speech in developing the children's capacity to explain ideas prior to writing:

*... we had all the arguments around on paper about economy and health and such, and when you are writing a balanced argument there's set words you use like however, or on the other hand, or some people believe, or it is widely known that, research tells us that. So we were trying to teach the children that language and obviously if they can talk it, if they are confident in talking it, and then they can say it, then they have got more of a chance of writing it. (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-2:2)*

Steve was referring to language as a tool that could help children articulate their thinking and hence, he believes that scaffolding of a writing task should involve talk. In the next utterance presented below, Steve expressed the view this talk principle was widely shared by other teachers within the school who were responsible for literacy. Following on from this, in the same passage, he reveals his pedagogical commitment to getting the children to become actively involved within his lessons.

*...if a child can't put together a proper sentence, there's going to be no way they can write it – and if they can't speak it-So we need to do a lot more speaking and listening so if I was planning a week of literacy, how I would do it, and I know this is the same for most of the teachers because we all share our ideas, is you would think okay, what's your focus? Say the focus of our ... say we were going to write a narrative story for instance, or a description, well whatever, first of all you would focus on your vocabulary. Right...and I would have a lot of that vocabulary already prepared and I would have maybe the thesaurus out and then I would try and find a way, me personally, an active way to engage the children where they are all sharing with each other. And that becomes a really nice lesson. (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3:6-7)*

Steve's report traced some similarities with the Vygotskian perspective of learning (See chapter 2; Literature Review) in that he made available to his students different sorts of materials: vocabulary, thesaurus, conventions for discussion, and the language itself. Furthermore, the students were not only encouraged to use these resources individually, but also in collaboration when preparing and carrying out the

learning tasks.

It could be argued that the above statements made by Steve resonated with the data reported in the earlier section regarding the observed episodes. For instance, Episode 6 (file: 711 0111; on 12th February, 2014) was preceded by activities that involved generation of vocabulary, the oral rehearsal of sentences, and the discussion within group work, all of which required the pupils to engage actively through talk. This format to Steve's lesson led me to the view that he had used it in earlier teaching, which probably explained why these pupils had the confidence to add their own ideas as well as to propose alternative suggestions to the piece of writing modelled by the teacher. Consequently, these data provide insights to the nature of the feedback process enacted by the teacher. Another example would be the extract regarding how to sequence a storyboard (file: 711 0112; on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014), in returning to this episode, it can be seen that Steve was monitoring the ways that his students were using the teaching material (pictures) and also how conceptual and cognitive tools were being developed through talk. So, bearing this idea in mind, Steve's feedback focus could be interpreted as conveying to the students that there was a strategy that could help to sequence correctly the storyboard, which involved the use of the resources provided and discussion during their team work. Therefore, when problems were raised by particular students regarding what was required, rather than providing a detailed explanation, he would refer the child back to prior learning and by so doing, the interaction proceeded with further opportunities for the class to engage in talk. Hence, talk was not just a tool for teaching and learning, for it also formed the basis of a procedure chosen by Steve to collect evidence of the learners' work thus far and to provide them with feedback. As a consequence, his formative assessment appeared to become embedded in his teaching (Black et al., 2003; Black and William, 2009, 2012)

- **Shared learning**

The notion of pupils generating ideas from each other, in preparing and devising pieces of writing, was explored more in depth by Steve when describing his practice from a broader perspective. As the observation data gave me the impression that pupils own initiative of posing questions or making suggestions was not unusual, I

asked Steve to elaborate on this matter. He described two intertwined ideas that shed light on his beliefs about his students' involvement in lessons.

First, he highlighted the relevance of creating a learning environment that encouraged the pupils to engage in the learning task and not to be afraid to share their ideas. He expressed the view that one of his main roles as a teacher should be contributing to building an atmosphere where positive regular feedback to the learners was the norm.

*...Some of the work I get from these children, I really do believe only comes from having that atmosphere, the college atmosphere when we are all sharing our ideas and me overacting at the front, going Oh my God!, that's amazing, fantastic and... you know, and the children feel enthused and they feel they can share anything ... . (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3:8)*

The above statement was in accord with what was observed throughout the classroom episodes. Expressions like: 'very good', 'look at that top man'; 'that is really good'; 'brilliant', 'everyone off you go' etc., were commonly used as part of the discourse. Steve described himself as 'over-acting' when undertaking this practice and then further clarified the meaning of this assertion. Whilst some children faced more difficulties with the learning task, he wanted all of his pupils to have a go at completing it. This is why he saw it as important for all of them to engage in team work so as to be able to hear and learn from each other's contribution:

*...There is a boy called S15 ...and it was a whole page on his own and you know, the spelling was awful, but I could read it and that's in half a year and if he had been left to work with a teacher all the time or on his own, he wouldn't have heard all that rich language, he wouldn't have experienced it... (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3:8)*

There is a resemblance with Vygotsky's notion of zone of proximal development (1978) in this utterance, in that this student, working together with other more competent children appears to have stimulated his engagement, which helped him to benefit from the learning process.

Steve gave a second reason why he wanted to have everyone working together, which was that, if they constantly had to be corrected by the teacher, it was more likely that some of the pupils would receive an underlying message that they lacked ability when

compared to their peers.

*Plus, if he's with a teacher all the time, what's that telling him? That's telling him psychologically that he's not as good as everybody else and he needs all this help. Whereas I have never ever grouped those children in ability – not once, not once since I have taught them this year have they been in ability groups, they have all been in mixed ability groups. (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3:8)*

From this, it seems that his approach is in line with incremental rather than entity theories of learning (Dweck, 2000). However, he did not overtly comment on any link between these insights and his practice. In fact, when reflecting on these issues at the time of this interview, it was only then that it dawned on him that he invariably put children who were at different learning stages together, thus providing them with the opportunity to share ideas. This is illustrated below:

*...And S15, he might be rubbish at writing, but he's got some great vocabulary. So when he's in a group and he's saying the words and somebody else is writing them down, that's his ideas being shared. And actually, I have not even thought about this, this is very interesting – not once have they been in ability groups, not once. So that is quite an interesting thing in itself, isn't it, because, I would sometimes do it in ability groups, but because I only teach on a Wednesday and Friday, I try and mix it up and make it very active, because otherwise they get bored with a whole two days of writing... (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3:8)*

This last excerpt led me to believe that regardless of whether Steve was consciously or not rendering principles derived from theory, the data as a whole illustrate that he was combining within his classroom practices a number of elements from cognitivist-constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning. He had developed a style of teaching, whereby feedback and learning were integrated. For instance, when a group of students presented their storyboard, when they had to discuss how to sequence it and to select the vocabulary to describe it, with Steve's approach, this provided opportunities for the negotiation of quality (Sadler, 1989).

To complete the section, I include an extract as an example of an instance in which one of the concerns emphasised by Steve during interview, namely, pupil engagement in learning, was seen to materialise in the classroom. It comes from lesson 9 (file: 711-

0150; 19/03/2014) when the class had finished a piece of collaborative writing and it was now time for student questions, before proceeding to independent writing. Curiously, some pupils did not ask questions, instead they wanted to express the effect that the writing activities had on them:

1. T: [00:43:00] Right, one at a time, yes S1.
2. S1: Sometimes when I'm doing a writing activity it seems like for some reason it seems like I don't want to stop writing.
3. T: Ah that's brilliant and that's why you're so good at writing you guys because you enjoy it and you produce great stuff and that's what we love, there's a saying, time flies, oh there's an idiom.
4. S2: Time flies when you're having fun, or something.  
*(...The teacher talked about a personal experience...then another student added...)*
5. S3: [00:45:49] the first thing is that before in year four [unclear 00:45:55] but now in year five I like it because now I'm better at it.

#### **5.4.4 Summary**

The following dimensions emerged from Steve's approach to providing feedback within the lessons observed. The data have illustrated that the feedback covered the quality of work as a continuous process. This allowed the pupils and teacher to share the criteria for writing at different stages in the development of learning tasks, which was not immediately apparent from the initial analysis. This is because the observed interaction during the episodes did not appear to be built on the basis of extended lines of inquiry, involving the elicitation of a range of pupil contributions to gather ideas and eventually arrive at a broad consensus. However, deeper analysis revealed that the teacher and his pupils shared a common understanding of what was going on and in some instances, the students were the ones who led the



discussion through their questions. Consequently, this does not support the initial impression that Steve was closing the sequences too swiftly, driven by the motivation to accomplish the lesson. What later became more evident from the data analysis was that Steve's observed actions when providing feedback were influenced by his own interpretation as to how students learn, which he also integrated into his practice. As mentioned above, this is consistent with cognitivist-constructivist theories of learning as well as sociocultural ones.

In terms of the areas that were emphasised, Steve focused on the enhancement of vocabulary and collecting evidence about how the pupils articulated and structured pieces of writing for different purposes, for instance, argumentation and description, according to the episodes selected. These elements were the conceptual and strategic resources that the students were encouraged to apply in their pieces of writing.

### **5.5 The teacher's approach to written forms of feedback**

The strategies that Steve devised to provide feedback to learners comprised the following: correcting errors related to spelling, grammar and punctuation; contributing very specific goals and precise success criteria on each piece of writing as well as using generic comments for the whole class; and, encouraging the learners to use their individual writing targets to assess their own work in addition to responding to the comments he had made. When describing the main components of the marking, Steve gave insights into what he believed should be the role of the students within the feedback process regarding written tasks.

#### **5.5.1 Focusing on basic errors**

In his formal interview, Steve made reference to the way in which he annotated students' pieces of writing. This procedure entailed underlining some words with a green highlighter pen to indicate to them when the criteria had been met and with an orange one when there was something that still needed to be done. When Steve went into more detail describing the intention in using this strategy, he talked mainly about the use of the orange pen. It appears that he marked all the mistakes, with his feedback being focused on getting the pupils to correct them:

- **Punctuation**

*... And all of them, across the whole school, instead of a teacher correcting a piece of writing, if say you have missed out some punctuation, we won't add the punctuation in, we will highlight the word in orange and then in a red pen the children go back and they will find out, right I have got orange there, what does that mean? What have I missed or what do I need to do and then they either do it or they ask the teacher, can you explain... And that's across the school, that's school policy. (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3:3-4)*

- **Spelling**

*...s o a q a in y o u s e e I h a v e u n d e r l i n e d t h a t b e c a u s e s h e ' s s p e l t i t w r o n g, what I haven't done is crossed out and written the right word because so what's that going to do? Nothing! Whereas if you have underlined it, that means the children's attention is brought there, right I have done something wrong here, what is it? And they have to work out what is wrong and that's much more powerful than just saying, "Oh yes, I got that wrong but Teacher has corrected it."... (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3: 4)*

It should be noted that, while the participant teacher pointed out what kind of errors were highlighted, namely, punctuation and spelling, he, at the same time, was concerned about giving the students the responsibility of checking their own work. He explained that pupils should try to figure out what exactly had to be corrected and stressed the futility of the teacher providing the answer. He also added that this approach was shared by all the members of the teaching staff within the school.

Figure 5.2, displayed within the next subsection, illustrates how Steve, instead of picking a specific mistake up and correcting it for the learner, insisted that she/he had to identify the corrections required based on the clues given (words or phrases underlined in orange). In this example, grammar errors were being flagged up and they were amended by the child using a red pen, thus reflecting the purpose envisaged by the teacher.

### **5.5.2 Feedback related to content**

Steve pointed out that written comments were very time consuming and this, to some extent, might have explained why he came up with the idea of using the same pre-

formulated comments for all his class, in form of stickers (see figures 5.1 and 5.2). Having said this, the teacher still had to make the decisions about what would be the messages conveyed to students when using this strategy. Steve brought out a variety of his students' books in order to illustrate that there was a consistent colour code within this sticker system. As a rule, the first comment was always preceded by a green emoticon to represent what had been done well, while an orange emoticon came before a second comment to symbolise what needed to be worked upon.

Each comment reflected specific intentions, which Steve explained as shown below.

- The first comment was designed to convey positive information that recognised the student's effort and to inform her/him whether they had met the success criteria:


*... I do a label that says, "W ell do n e, yo u 've tried hard," o r s o meth in g lik e th a t, "please do your corrections in red." And then underneath, the moving on comment, it will say something like "Don't forget to include ... (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3: 4)*

*...s o lo o k, "W ell do n e, yo u 've in clud ed s ome o f th e s u cce s s criteria . Can you write a sentence that uses ...?" And then I left it blank because when she's done her success criteria, she's not included a metaphor, so I have just put that. So sticking that on and writing two words is a lot less time consuming ...", (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-3: 4)*

- The second comment suggests, on the one hand, where the student should make corrections, and on the other, there is a request for further action related to the quality of language expression or the use of figurative language:

*...the orange one, because we underline in orange, is can you do your corrections in red pen and then write a sentence that contains 'Despite' So that's your moving on task and you can see then she's responded to my marking ... (Steve, St Albert Primary School. Int-3: 5)*


In what follows, I introduce two examples of writing tasks taken from students' books in order to portray the drafting and purposes contained within the pre-formulated comments devised by this participant teacher.




L.I. I can write the opening paragraph of a story and set the mood using appropriate vocabulary and grammar.

S.C. Use a connective: despite, although, however. Use your target card to hit your writing target.

Boom boom! My heart pounded curious as I am attempting to escape from my body as I raced through the gloomy, isolated streets for my dear life, my gut banging at top speed, praying I wouldn't be followed by danger. Dear Lord, please help me. Fortunately, I discovered a minuscule gap between two derelict, deserted houses. Although still quaking in my boots, I decided to cautiously creep out of the superb hiding place; just as I was doing this, the sound a 'zip' just gelled my ears.



Well done! You have achieved some of the success criteria. You have managed to use one or two connectives



Can you do your corrections in red pen and then write a sentence below that contains 'despite'?

<sup>the gut</sup>  
Despite ~~knowing~~ the danger had passed, I continued to run for my life. I was terror-stricken.

Despite wanting to escape, I still surveilled my head to inspect the curious noise, wondering what it was, hoping it wasn't hazardous.

Figure 5.1 Example of a writing task and the feedback provided. Y5-student. Steve-Class Teacher.

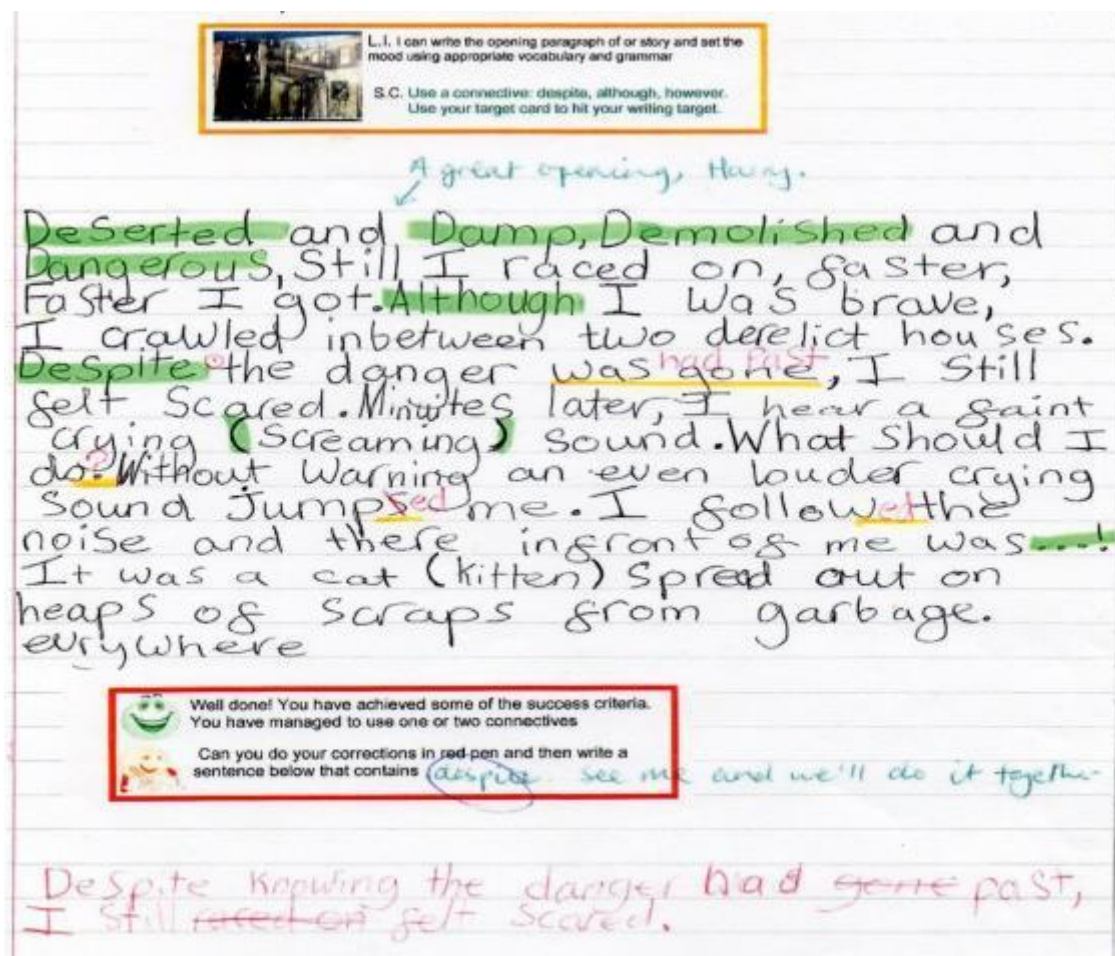


Figure 5.2. Example of a writing task and the feedback provided. Y5 student. Steve-Class Teacher.

It should be noted that, in both examples, the advice regarding follow-up action, i.e. 'write a sentence that uses, or contains...', involved a suggestion centred on the use of language to clarify meaning. At interview, Steve also made reference to other prompts where the students should write sentences by including a metaphor. Thus, it is apparent that the teacher had decided that certain aspects of the writing would be assessed and the message was mainly focused on making judgements about these. Generally, figures 5.1 and 5.2 depict all the components of the Steve's marking approach (learning intention, success criteria, comments and highlighting mechanisms). However, in this section I mainly focused on feedback through comments, trying to elucidate how the teacher expected his students to respond to these as well as what was stressed when evaluating the quality of writing.

### 5.5.3 Recognising quality in a piece of writing: what a student can do

Other components of note within Steve's approach to marking pertained to the learning objectives and success criteria. When questioned, he provided insights regarding how to foster students' understanding of what counts as a good piece of writing. Above, it was reported that Steve used the same set of comments for all 33 children in his class. However, subsequent descriptions by him revealed that he had developed the practice of using the learning objectives flexibly. Regarding which, whenever he found a child was yet to meet the learning intention of a particular piece of work, he would refrain from using the sticker system, instead he would suggest to the student to employ the individual target card. That is, he would backtrack to previous writing targets not yet accomplished by the student:

*...So what I might do is, if I am introducing a different thing that they haven't learnt yet, then that becomes my success criteria. And then I will see if they have used it or not and if they haven't the task will be to use it [individual target card] rather than this [sticker] which is just making sure that they remember to keep going on everything. (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-1: 4)*

It would appear that as the comments were not individual for each child, the teacher hoped the students would be able to recognise what the learning objective was leading to, in their actual writing task. It may not be enough to rely only on the comments themselves to understand what quality looks like. Therefore, the pupils were expected to be proactive in taking responsibility for their learning and the teacher had great faith in all of his Y5 students being able to understand what was required:

*... but actually if you have got a group of kids that are able like these kids, I really need to think well they are all capable of unpicking what it is they done well and what it is they need to improve... (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-1: 6)*

As stated earlier, in addition to the success criteria for a specific writing task, the teacher included, on the stickers, an overt indication like 'use your target card to hit your writing target' (see figure 5.1 and 5.2) and thus, the children were prompted to use this as way to modify their work themselves. However, when he described how these individual cards would work inside the classroom, the purpose of these

promoting understanding appeared to become lost, for this was limited to checking what aspects were present or absent within the piece of writing.

*...I ask the children to as they are doing their writing, when they hit – they include one of these success criteria – they tick it off themselves. So again it is giving them the responsibility to say, right I have included this, I have included that and they get to know what makes a good piece of writing. But again, if I haven't seen it, I am going to write it... (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int-1: 7)*

Generally, Steve seemed to have an interpretation of how his students should take actions about his feedback. Some of these actions were geared to working flexibly towards the learning intention and the understanding of the success criteria. He also encouraged his students to use the individual writing targets to analyse their work. It could be argued that the efficacy of such a system depends on how the students respond to it and the degree to which they are capable of interpreting the different components of the teacher's feedback through reflection. This issue cannot be fully addressed just by drawing on this set of data and will be revisited in chapter 8 (subsection 8.2.2.3), when the interplay between this and other data sources is discussed.

#### **5.5.4 Summary**

The main features of Steve's approach to marking can be summarised as follows. Part of the feedback strategies were related to correcting basic errors, but the teacher did not explicitly indicate whether he chose to highlight specific mistakes. He seemed to be more concerned with emphasising that, whatever the error was (spelling, punctuation or grammar) the students had to pay attention to what kind they needed to correct. He expressed the view that feedback would be more relevant, if the students were encouraged to check their own work instead of the teacher correcting specific mistakes for them.

A number of messages were involved within the predetermined comments: providing positive information by recognising pupils' effort; communicating success criteria and indicating whether they had met them; signalling where corrections should be made; and requesting further action from the learners, which related to the quality of the language expression ('Add a sentence that contains despite'). This last point reflected Steve's decisions on what aspects of the writing were being assessed, which in turn seemed to be aligned with the content of the curriculum he was implementing.

The learning objective and success criteria were also provided on stickers and arose from the task. Both these components were tightly linked with comments. For instance, if the success criteria said: '*Use a connective: despite, although, however*', the comment would indicate: '*write a sentence that contains the connective Despite*'. In this way, the teacher expected that feedback would make sense to the majority of his students. However, if a particular child was not able to meet the learning intention, she/he would be encouraged to take into account her/his individual writing targets when revising her/his piece of writing. This suggests that, Steve had developed a view of working flexibly with the learning objective, as he had an unwavering perspective regarding how the students should respond to his written feedback. He expressed high expectations about what the children could do in terms of analysing their own work; however, it cannot be understood yet, by just relying on this set of data, how feedback may have helped the pupils in developing the necessary skills and autonomy to actively reflect on their pieces of writing, especially, when the mechanisms to provide written feedback were highly structured.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Carolyn, Class Teacher, St. Thomas's Primary School**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter is structured as follows. It begins with a description of the main components of the school policy on feedback with the purpose of contextualising Carolyn's experience in the classroom. Next, it presents the class teacher by giving introductory information about her work on feedback and formative assessment. Then, the results section is developed, which contains a number of subsections, the first of which refers to observation data and presents the analysis of selected classroom episodes or events that have the potential for feedback to occur. This is complemented by the analysis of the follow up interviews in order to document some reflections from the teacher on her own assessment practices in her lessons. Subsequently, a summary is provided pointing out the main insights that emerged from the participant teacher's feedback during spoken interaction. The chapter also reports on Carolyn's approach to written forms of feedback based upon the analysis the data gathered from a semi-structured interview and examples of marking in the pupils' books.

#### **6.2 Marking Policy - St. Thomas's Primary School**

During the data collection period, the staff members of this school were actively discussing their marking policy and practice. Soon after I had completed it, including conducting the interviews, the school adopted a new marking policy. In fact, there have been two policy documents, the first was adopted in 2013, and the second was rolled out in September 2014, both of which contain elements of relevance to the current study and from now on I refer to them as the 2013 and 2014 documents.

- **2013 document**

The 2013 document begins with a general description of the rationale of the marking scheme. It stresses the need for teachers to show how they respond to

children's work. It highlights the intended purpose of marking, namely, it should help the students: to make improvements in their learning, to become more confident, to develop their self-esteem and to promote their self-assessment. Following these aims, a list of guidelines is presented. These guidelines comprise a number of suggestions relating to how to implement feedback. For instance, it should identify strengths and weaknesses within pupils' work to clarify achievements and future targets. It also promotes the use of marking as an integral part of the classroom activities, providing opportunities, firstly, for children to hear comments on their work, but also feedback information should be considered by teachers as informing future planning. In addition, successful pieces of work should be valued and praised by including them in the 'Good Work Book'.

Other general suggestions are made regarding the design of written comments and about the correction of spelling and punctuation. Comments should be focused on curriculum content and learning objectives as well as taking into account the different abilities of children. Where repeated spelling mistakes are found, the first example should be corrected and the others only underlined; however, punctuation must be corrected in all instances.

In the final part of the 2013 document, a list of criteria is provided for evaluating this marking policy. Broadly these focus on: whether the pupils read the teachers' feedback and act on it, whether they are able to recognise their targets and work to achieve them; whether the teachers modify their planning after providing feedback to students; and whether the subject coordinators look for evidence of marking within the students' books and prepare a sampling of feedback practices according to the described policy.

The head teacher, deputy head teacher, subject coordinators and teachers, were involved in evaluating the feedback policy on an on-going basis, whereby they would regularly look at examples of marking in pupils' books so as to highlight good practice. At a time of the interviewing the two teachers within this school were already reflecting upon some of this on-going discussion, which eventually would be part of a new marking scheme.

- **2014 document**

In the 2014 document the feedback policy covers the following issues: guiding principles, the methodology of marking children's work, specific suggestions for marking in different subjects, and the procedures for evaluating the policy. In this summary, I select those elements of the policy that can help to contextualise the teacher participants' accounts concerning their own feedback practices. Regarding the rationale of this marking scheme, there is a focus on success and improvement needs that match learning objectives. This intention is defined as constructive feedback, and it is believed that it allows the students to become reflective learners, thereby being able to close the gap between what they currently do know and what the teaching team expects them to grasp. It appears that the responsibility to provide feedback went beyond the class-teacher, as the policy recognises that the teaching team comprises teachers, teaching assistants, nursery nurses and any other specialist teachers employed by the school. In addition to linking feedback with learning objectives, other principles underpinning the policy are: give the learners recognition and praise for their achievements, informing future planning and encouraging children to respond and reflect on marking. These tenets are also included in the 2013 document.

Regarding the methodology for providing feedback a number of suggestions are made. In what follows I will refer to what is defined as quality marking and student response to feedback.

- **Quality marking**

The policy recommends that a minimum of one in every three pieces of work should be quality marked, which involves:

1. Read the entire piece of work.
2. Highlight up to three examples within the piece of work to show where the child has met the learning objective.
3. Write a comment that should be linked to the highlighting to help students to improve in future and which contributes to extending their thinking. In the subject literacy, in particular, the comments could take the form of 'Three stars

and a wish' (KS1), as described in a previous chapter, or 'Sunshine and growth' (KS2). The Sunshine and growth method involves highlighting with a yellow pen what has been achieved and with a green pen, what still needs to be improved.

4. Mark spelling, punctuation and grammar but this is not necessary for every piece of work.
5. Use symbols as shorthand where appropriate, but the teacher needs to ensure, first, that the students know what these represent.

- **Student response to feedback**

The policy also introduces specific suggestions aimed at promoting self-and-peer-marking. In this regard, the policy indicates that older children should be able to identify successes and what to improve in their pieces of work. To achieve this purpose, they may use the 'Three stars and a wish' strategy, which could serve as basis for discussion and learning in a plenary that could be organised within a lesson.

In the final part of the 2014 document the monitoring process of this policy is explained. It comprises the following procedures as: revision of the planning lessons; monitoring children's books by subject leaders in order to highlight good feedback practices, and based on this, there should be the creation of a summary document for discussion by all staff members. The policy also recommends that this evaluation process should be continuous, i.e. being subject to ongoing consultation by staff.

### **6.3 Carolyn- Class Teacher**

When interviewed, Carolyn expressed a view of Assessment *for* learning as a process for collecting information about what the students had achieved and not achieved against the learning goal. This perspective seemed to be aligned with the idea of giving the foremost role to the teacher in making such judgments:

*... They are children and they don't know...They think they've done it well or they are trying their best and so sometimes they need somebody to tell them*

*that's not actually ... you're not quite meeting the learning objective because of this, so try to change this in your writing, or whatever it is, and you will get there or your levels will improve... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 12)*

Carolyn also alluded to the phrase *Assessment of learning* and highlighted its summative intention centred on determining what children had learnt, through tests. Then, she attempted to develop a distinction between the two phrases by stating that, in the case of *assessment for learning*, its pivotal feature is that:

*'Ongoing I guess is the key word here, because they may not achieve it first time' (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 12)*

The above assertion appears to reflect an interpretation of formative assessment that contravenes its original purpose. Carolyn's description has a resemblance with continuous assessment (Sadler; 1989, 2007, 2010), this in order to get the children through where they should be with reference to the learning objective (Swaffield, 2011). These notions together with the centrality of the teacher's role raised the issue of whether the conceptual differentiation between the two terms (*Assessment of* and *for learning*) becomes blurred within this part of her account.

It is important to note that, at that time, Carolyn felt that a lot of emphasis was being placed on the *Assessment for learning* approach aimed at teaching with excellence: *'when I was training...always a huge focus was how you are using assessment for learning and how are you giving them feedback and ...there is like a whole teaching standard on it...'* (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 10). She highlighted that there was a policy within the school that explained how to approach feedback and it was part of regular staff discussions. They shared a booklet which contained good examples of marking across the school. While she identified this booklet as part of the monitoring process by school leaders, she also considered it helpful for knowing how other colleagues performed marking: *'We have only got one class per year group, so I work alone a lot, so I don't get the opportunity to go and see other classes and look at their books. So, it was quite nice actually seeing how other people mark and try to give next steps in their marking, so it was quite interesting to see'* (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 4).

During the process of data collection for this study, Carolyn willingly disclosed many of the procedures she used to provide feedback to her students and her reflections on these helped to unpack the underlying meanings and principles that drove her practice.

#### **6.4. Carolyn's enactment of feedback practices inside the classroom**

##### **6.4.1 Feedback before engagement with the task**

In this subsection, I examine classroom episodes to illustrate the ways in which Carolyn and her students engaged with success criteria. I consider episodes across different lessons that focus on the 'Discussion-content' phase, within the interactional context of whole class teaching. The extracts were selected to reflect the teacher's decisions in terms of strategies commonly used by her in order to show her pupils what quality looks like in a piece of work. For instance, Carolyn and her class drew up a set of criteria for writing different sort of texts, which were used within the planning stage of the lesson activity and through the process of teacher modelling.

The analysis focuses on the nature of the exchanges, with the aim being to ascertain whether they had to do with providing pupils with prompts of what needed to be done in order to complete the task at hand or whether they emphasised the enhancement of the quality of future work (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003). I pay attention to teacher-student interaction in terms of how questions were framed and how the answers were addressed in order to achieve a better understanding of the nature of what was elicited from the students (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Leung, 2004) as well the content of feedback prioritised by this participant teacher.

The analysis of each selected piece of data (assessment events or episodes) is preceded by an outline of the corresponded observed lesson. It comprises a description of the main phases with the specific aims and the activities carried out. This is intended to contextualise the issues that shape the interaction within the episodes that are brought in for examination.

- *Lesson context concerning Episode 9*

This pertains to the eighth lesson observed in Carolyn's class on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2014 (file: 711 0127). The learning objective of the lesson was 'To be able to describe a setting using imagery'. At the start of the lesson the teacher distributed the pupils' books for them to see her written feedback on their last piece of writing. She asked several students to read out the corresponded devised comments: ... 'Can somebody tell me one thing that I said you need to improve in the next piece of writing?'... [00:14:15]. Six students responded within this part of the exchanges (S24, S12, S25, S26, S 13, S 11). The teacher used the information shared as an opportunity to assert what elements pupils should try harder on in future tasks, for instance: the knowledge of how to use punctuation; the knowledge of vocabulary; and the sentence structure, which would be also considered in summative assessment ... '*Now when I test you, I obviously have to go by how well you perform on your test, but part of it is my teacher assessment of you*'... [00:15:02]. Following this part of the interaction Carolyn marked the beginning of one of the main activities of the actual lesson, by referring pupils back to the planning they did in the previous one, concerning setting description, based on the text '*The Highwayman by Alfred Noyes*'. She gave the pupils time to annotate in their books the pertinent learning objective and let them to see again the video about the Highway Man, but only that part that was relevant to the writing they should do later on. There was no discussion on the video, but rather the teacher marked the starting of a modelling strategy: 'I am going to read you my version of the setting description and we are going to talk about what's good and what's not good, okay?'... [00:21:20]

The modelling was enacted by Question & Answer sequences that required the pupils to identify phrases within the teacher's exhibited example that reflected the use of figurative language and other features typical of descriptive writing. Some questions posed by Carolyn included: 'Can you please pick up a sentence where I used personification?' 'What other features have we got in there?'. Episode 9 that was selected for examination below is located within this part of the interaction and illustrates, specifically, the teacher-student exchanges discussing personification:

- *Episode 9: Can you pick up a sentence where I used personification?*

This extract comes from lesson 8 (file:711 0127; on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2014) within the lesson context provided above:

1. T: So, it is literally a snapshot in time of him when he's riding, what is around him, what can be heard, what can be seen. Can you pick out please a sentence where I used personification? There is quite a bit of personification, you must use it – it is one of success criteria. S12.
2. S12: The wind whistled.
3. T: Excellent, so the wind whistled in his ears. So, you can hear the wind whistling, it is really personifying it, giving it human features. S11?
4. S11: The trees shook angrily.
5. T: Yes, the trees shook angrily – so you can imagine them. I didn't mention anything to do with fingers or trees dancing, I have interpreted it as the trees might have been angry at being disturbed but you may have other ideas. They may dance in celebration of a new arrival or something like that. You may want to change it. S24?
6. S24: The ground groaned beneath the horse's feet.
7. T: Exactly, so you can imagine it groaning, going grrr because it is being trod on or stamped on all over. S21?
8. S21: The shadows chased him along the winding road.
9. T: Excellent, so you have got this idea of the shadow chasing him, like a human would chase. S15? There are loads of examples there of personification...

*(two more students gave examples of personifications. Then, the interaction continued for the recognition of: metaphors; effective verbs; sentence openers; and alliteration and similes, treated in that order. Drawing on this, next, the teacher and her class set the success criteria for descriptive writing, time was allocated for independent writing and finally, within Revision work – phase peer-assessment on the work produced was undertaken).*

In this exchange the teacher was using the pupils' answers to illustrate her explanations of what the criteria were and she directed the class to focus on



these, whilst at the same time, she was checking their understanding of personification. She achieved both purposes by asking individuals to identify, within the model written by her, those phrases in which the focal device (personification) was used (line 1). When four students provided satisfactory answers, they were followed by Carolyn's comments, which comprised a combination of evaluative moves: 'excellent' (lines 3 and 9); 'yes' (line 5); and 'exactly' (line 7), with enlarged descriptions aimed at trying to make it clearer for the rest of the class (lines 3, 5, 7-9).

By interpreting the students' responses in this way, without delaying evaluative moves, the weight of the interaction remained in the hands of the teacher. Despite Carolyn's prompt to her students to introduce variations to the example given by drawing on their own ideas (line 5), when suggestions were made by the pupils, it did not trigger further discussion. The students were not asked to elaborate further on their ideas, and the line of inquiry did not consider to eliciting contributions from the rest of the class. The evaluative moves took precedence over other sort of acts. This approach, alongside the perceived need to address other features for writing a description, before carrying on with other phases of the lesson, geared the balance of the interaction towards task criteria (Torrance & Pryor, 1998) instead of allowing for a broader exploration of quality. The sequences that occurred immediately after this episode were in a similar vein, as evident in the segment below (file: 711-0127; on 3rd March, 2014):

1. T: ...Excellent. Metaphors-where have I used metaphor?
2. S: The moon was a ghostly galleon.
3. T: Excellent. So, I have taken that from the –remember a galleon is a ship, the moon was a ghostly galleon- it is a direct comparative, it is a metaphor there. So, I have done that, tick it. S19?

This added segment set the same character or tone for the interaction between the teacher and the student as occurred with the personification episode. This time, Carolyn verified that the pupil had correctly identified a metaphor, as well as using his/her response to add some elements, which eventually would be taken up for the rest of the pupils.

Arguably, episode 9: '*Can you pick up a sentence where I have used personification?*', demonstrates that the feedback was designed to enable the children to recognise a criterion in advance by using the teacher's model. The framing of these sequences also illustrates that complex aspects of quality were not addressed, as the teacher was concerned with covering one particular feature separated from the others. As such, the boundaries between modelling and providing instructions about how the work needed to be performed appear to have been blurred.

#### **6.4.2 Feedback on students' work before the completion of the final product**

In this subsection, I examine episodes that can serve to illustrate another dimension of Carolyn's feedback practices. These were taken from different lessons, specifically, within the 'Revision work' phase in the context of whole class teaching. The extracts show that some of the activities devised by Carolyn involved different groups acting out a poem followed by feedback from the class with the teacher's guidance. On other occasions, they read aloud their partners' pieces of work and offered verbal feedback about it. Subsequently, more students added observations prompted by the teacher.

The actions within the episodes under examination appeared to be devised, on the one hand, to help students recognise what aspects were still missing in order to complete the work. On the other, the teacher could get an idea of how the students were approaching the task and hence, monitor their progress. Given these purposes were emphasised by Carolyn, this opened the possibility to look at these interactions in terms of discerning whether the focus was to pick up evidence from the learners to support them in the understanding of quality (Black *et al.*, 2003) or whether these actions were driven by some other reference point, for instance, to ensure the task was on target (Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

In general, looking at how these verbal interactions are framed and the messages conveyed to the students can reveal the nature and the scope of the feedback practices. In this sense, the analysis addresses whether they were oriented towards

correcting work or encouraging the students to take further action (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam 2009, 2012).

Furthermore, Carolyn referred to a strategy for providing qualitative judgements or written feedback comments, from the teacher or peers, which in the literature is known as comment-only marking (Black *et al.*, 2003: 43). Its intention is to communicate to the learners the strengths within their work and to provide guidance about what aspects still needed to be worked out. It could be the case that Carolyn rendered this idea from the theory, and she used a particular structure to translate it into practice. This structure comes out throughout these sequences, namely: WWW (What went well) to describe the good things; and EBI (Even better if) to point out the weaknesses. It is not the intention to argue beforehand how the teacher dealt with this practice, but rather, this point has been introduced here, in order to contextualise the data reported below. It can provide better understanding of the episodes given that the teacher used these abbreviated forms or acronyms within the exchanges.

- *Lesson context regarding Episode 10*

This corresponded to the fifth lesson observed in Carolyn's class on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 (file: 711 0094). The learning objective stated for this lesson was 'To be able to perform a poem'. After collecting worksheets and other materials from a previous lesson, the teacher introduced the main activity to be carried out by pupils. ... 'Right, so, we're doing some poetry today. We have been doing poetry for the last two weeks. Now we are going to practice performing a poem'... [00:05:12].

The following sequences involved the teacher and her students collectively drawing up a list of success criteria for performing the *Fruit Picking* poem. Carolyn communicated to her class that these elements were related to key vocabulary that would be given as clues to them about what she was expecting from their performance, which was going to be filmed [00:05:43]. Some of those aspects made reference to, were: 'vary your pitch'; 'include a rhythm'; 'vary the speed', 'vary the

*tone*'; *'you could use gestures*'; *'use multiples readers*' and *'use appropriate volume*' etc. (file:711-0094). Then the pupils, organised in groups, were given around 20 minutes time to practise at their tables.

The Revision-work phase of the lesson was then carried out. During these interactions, six different groups were asked to come out to the front of the class to perform the poem. The teacher advised the class they should use the criteria already discussed to comment on their peers' work and all of these points remained on the flipchart at the front on the class. Episode 10, which I have singled out for analysis below, portrays some sequences from this part of the lesson. It illustrates specifically the feedback provided by the teacher and her class to Group Number three, after they recited the poem:

- *Episode 10*: What were the WWW things? - Was there anything they could have done even better?

This extract comes from lesson 5; Revision-work-phase (file 711 0094; on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2013) and it was preceded by the lesson context outlined above.

1. T: [00:53:59] Very nice, good. Okay, it was different. [...] What was different about that? What were the WWW things? What did you hear, what did you notice?
2. S1: They were good when they were taking turns and it was like, it's quite difficult to do that sort of thing, [inaudible 00:54:22]
3. T: Yeah, they definitely did that very well. Especially when you're doing it in twos as well and alternating, that was very good. S16?
4. S16: They used their...
5. T: Excuse me. Do you want to have a go? Alright, sorry. Right, again.
6. S16: They used their beat when they were saying: here is a tune for pickers to hum.
7. T: So they listened to the words in the poem, and they start to talk about a tune and humming, so that's when they introduced the beat, that was quite nice, a nice touch, every verse was slightly different. S24?

8. S24: They had resourceful groups, because they were showing, the picking of the fruit, which was really nice.
9. T: Yeah, that was really nice, the visual, holding hands, what it looks like. Was there anything they could have done even better? They could improve one thing, there's one thing I made a note of a few of the groups actually, could have done this. Really good at changing the rhythm and the beat, and things like that, but not so strong on something else. Yeah?

In line 1, Carolyn framed the beginning of the sequence using successive questions, which seemed to convey different notions in terms of how feedback should be addressed. On the one hand, the query ... *'What was different about that?'*...might have signalled a subtle invitation to the students to comment on their peers' work based on a comparison with the previous group's performance. On the other, the question ... *'What were the WWW things? ...'*, somehow, invoked a structure for the drafting of written comments, and the teacher suggesting that the pupils use the same method for providing verbal feedback within this interaction along with EBI. It could be surmised that Carolyn was expecting to hear qualitative judgments from the class, with the particular focus being on the work of group number three. In this sense, the feedback function differed from what she seemed to convey through her first question (groups compared with one another). Next, the teacher asked her students to indicate what strengths they saw in the work presented, before being asked what could be improved.

The pupils seemed to be familiar with this method as some of them interpreted the teacher's request by indicating what were the good things, as for instance did S1 (line 2). The pupil's observation was accepted by Carolyn, as she made explicit her agreement and then, slightly rephrased the student's response (line 3). Two other students expressed their opinions: S16 made reference to the use of beat (line 6), and S 24 described that she/he liked how the group found a way to depict a verse from the poem (line 8). On these two occasions, the teacher again decided to reformulate the pupils' comments (lines 7 and 9). These actions could be interpreted as an attempt to make them clearer for the rest of the class, but they could also be seen as an evaluation of the kind of feedback provided by pupils; a role mainly

relying on the teacher.

By posing the question ... *'Was there anything they could have done even better?'*... (line 9) Carolyn was indicating that the feedback focus had moved on to identifying what aspects from the performing of the poem should be improved, thereby continuing with her WWW followed by EBI strategy. In the same line, the teacher indicated that she believed something had been overlooked, but as she gave no further hint as to what this might be, this promoted the pupils having to guess. Then, the sequence continued:

10. S: Timing.

11. T: Yeah, so the volume pretty much stayed the same. What else stayed the same? S21?

12. S21: Stayed the same all the way through.

13. T: What stayed the same? Or both, whichever one you want. [*The teacher pointed out two criteria from the list on the flipchart*]

14. S21: I was going to say that they don't do any actions.

15. T: Okay, they didn't use actions, they did have the pictures, but in terms of their voice, if this was just recorded, what do I want to hear? S16?

16. S16: Expression

17. T: Yeah, expression. I thought that, a lot of the groups actually, all reading at a very similar tone. And I know my group here, you've been trying to vary the pitch and tone, so I'm quite looking forward to hearing that, and see if you're going to stick to it. Because it's quite nice, you're reading the lines like normal, and then to this beat, while you check, you know, you're reading one at a time, or two at a time, so that would be one thing I noticed, in the letter, just make sure you vary the pitch. Okay, but fantastic, girls, great. Next group then. [00:56:31]

*(three more groups acted out the poem and received verbal feedback from the teacher and the class; the lesson ended after the last group performance)*  
[00:69:44].

When the students tried to guess what the teacher wanted to hear their responses were reduced to one word, for instance: ...*'Timing'*... (line 10)...

'Expression'... (line 16). Meanwhile, Carolyn intervened, progressively narrowing the clues (see lines 11, 13 and 15), until she eventually revealed the two features still needed: tone and pitch (line 17). In addition, the teacher mentioned the group that had her help during the preparation stage, by expressing her expectation that they would apply these two features, which the others had not demonstrated yet...*'so I'm quite looking forward to hearing that, and see if you're going to stick to it'...* (line 17). This small act appears to show Carolyn providing feedback in the form of comparison of different students' achievements, which returns us back to one of the prompts given by the teacher in the very first line of this episode.

Arguably this episode, as a whole, reflects an unresolved tension. The first part of the interaction (from lines 1 to 9) gave more potential for the children to elaborate upon qualitative observations, and whilst their interventions were not further explored, they still expressed their opinions and tried to give some reasons for these each time. The second part of the interaction (from line 9 to line 17) was set out to determine what features were absent in the performing of the poem. Hence, the balance of these later exchanges seemed to shift towards correctness and guessing. I had the impression that the omnipresent list of criteria on the flip chart permeated the second part of this episode, rather than providing the prompt of giving suggestions for improvement. Moreover, the teacher's message, intended or not, which might have triggered the comparison between different groups, added more complexities to understanding what was actually driving her feedback practice. This also made it difficult to ascertain how feedback through this interaction was affecting the pupils, such as whether it helped them to understand that they were not as good as others or whether they had learned about quality.

- Lesson context relating to Episode 11

The outline of the eighth lesson observed in Carolyn's class on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2014 (file: 711 0127) has been given to summarise the teacher-students interactions that preceded and affected Episode 9 (see section 6.4.1). As stated earlier, the 'learning objective for the whole lesson was 'To be able to describe a setting using imagery' and the teacher and her class were engaged in a modelling activity (example devised by

the teacher) that addressed those devices and features that would help in descriptive writing (personification, alliteration, among others). Up to this point, the sequences have been delineated to explain the selection of Episode 9. Now, I focus in more detail on those subsequent phases of the same lesson that went prior to Episode 11.

Drawing on the previous modelling activity the teacher and her class set the success criteria for descriptive writing. Within Questions & Answer sequences, those elements pertaining to figurative language have been highlighted and others were added, such as *'varying the sentence opener'*, *'varying the sentence length'*, *'using the past tense'*. When these aspects of quality had been stated, Carolyn decided to get the list printed off and communicated this to her pupils [00:40:59]. After that, time was allocated for independent writing, during which, Carolyn moved around the tables looking at the work being done. At some point, when she had got the criteria check list ready, she asked her pupils to put it in their Literacy books and indicated to them to use it in order to assess their own work in progress: ...' you are supposed to be using it as you write as a check list of what to include. So, check have you included adjectives, have you included adverbs, have you included personification?'... [001:15:51].

The Revision work-phase of the lesson no longer emphasised having the children complete the success criteria list, at least not immediately. The teacher instead, asked her students to swap books with their partners in order to write comments on their work [01:23:33] ...*'you are not filling in your partner's success criteria for them that is for them to do. What you are doing is reading their work and can you tell them – put www – what went well and give two things that went well and one thing that would make their work even better if – EBI, okay? Can you get that done, please?'* [01:24:30]. Within subsequent interactions the teacher asked a range of pupils to read their peer's writing and the comments they had made on it. Episode 11, which I have selected below for analysis, provides sequences extracted from this activity involving peer- assessment and feedback.



- *Episode 11*: I know what my favourite part of that was but you can tell me your own – S11?

The following extract comes from lesson 8; 'Revision-work-phase' (file 711 0127; on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2014), within the lesson context described above.

1. T: [01:33:06] Has anyone got a book that they would like to share? That they have read, someone's work that they've read and thought, wow that was amazing – I can't actually think of any way to improve it because it's so good. I know you have put that so let's see, I want to hear it. So, everybody listen, please. [...] Put your hands down and listen. Okay, S10 is going to read S30's. Sorry, before you read it, can you tell me what your feedback is to her about *what went well*.
2. S10: It flows beautifully and it has [inaudible: 01:33:49] and it has a very professional feel to it.
3. T: Oh, fantastic. Okay. Off you go, S10, loud – in a big loud voice.
4. S10: */reading aloud S30's piece of writing: descriptive text; topic: The Highwayman/*
5. T: Wow, I think a round of applause. I liked the drama, and there were some really lovely bits. I know what my favourite part of that was but you can tell me your own – S11?
6. S11: I think was when the ... [...]
7. T: Yes, that was my favourite bit as well. [...]. That was actually one of my favourite bits as well, with the footprints that I really got this image in my head of him having left footprints behind. That was really nice, S30, really nice. What else was good about that? S3.
8. S3: She used lots of effective verbs ...
9. T: Can you think of one off the top of your head? An effective verb that she used.
10. S3: I liked the word slumber.
11. T: Slumber, yes, good. So, woken from slumber, okay. Any other verbs, effective verbs?
12. S3: I think slumber was ...

13. T: Okay, so waking from slumber. Okay, S11 – no, you have already said something. Who else would like to say something? S13.
14. S13: Well she used adverbs, she particularly used good vocabulary.
15. T: So, can you give me examples, because I know she used good vocabulary, but I want an example.
16. S13: Instead of saying ... what I'm trying to say is, she improved her vocabulary, because she didn't put boring words, but he put different words to me.
17. T: Okay, I am going to ask someone else to read theirs, but I want you to all really listen for specific things that you like. So, I want you to say, I really like this sentence – it's personification, or I really like this simile, and explain why you like it. Not just that it is good vocabulary.
- (two more students read their peer's work and the comments they provided with other pupils and the teacher offering also some observation).*

The initiating exchange ...*Has anyone got a book that they would like to share?* ...might have signalled that Carolyn hoped for contributions from the whole class, in terms of describing the strengths within their partners' work. Nevertheless, this first intention became entangled in the subsequent prompts given by the teacher. It seemed that she had already selected whose piece of writing would be presented and discussed, by asking specifically that S10 read S 30's work (line 1).

Once S10 had read the piece of writing, the teacher requested the class to praise it by a round of applause. This act involved an evaluative move, and a positive judgement, but, it did not close the sequence, for in the same line Carolyn asked for another student's opinion (Line 5). The recording did not properly capture S11's response, but the content of his/her feedback could be inferred from the teacher's follow up, when she paraphrased back the fragment selected by the child as his/her favourite (line 7).

Next, other students were asked to contribute. Two pupils observed particular elements within S30's work, with S3 pointing out the use of effective verbs and S 13 making reference to the use of adverbs and good vocabulary. While this interaction implied the process of peer assessment, the teacher also seemed to be interested in

checking the understanding of those who were making these contributions. Thus, these two students were prompted to indicate specifically the corresponding words or phrases with effective verbs and adverbs within the text they had heard (lines 9 and 15). In a way, two parallel processes of assessment went on within this interaction, one focused on a piece of writing of a particular child, another paid attention to the ways that others provided feedback in terms of trying to discern their knowledge on aspects including figurative language, or grammar, depending on the sort of text involved.

This teacher's intention of using feedback to test what the pupils knew seems to have been recognised by the class. For instance, S13 wanted to participate again trying to adjust her/his observations in accordance with the teacher's advice. So, when the work of a second pupil was presented, she/he was attentive and voluntarily took part in the interaction again, perhaps because this student wanted recognition from the teacher for getting it right. This is illustrated in the segment below (also from file 711-0127; on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2014):

28. T:... Good, so you have got a bit of repetition there as well. So, what was good? What example did you hear? ...S13, have you got an example this time?

29. S13: Yes, she used alliteration – whistling wind, and she used personification when she said he awoke nature.

30. T: Fantastic.

31. S13: And she used –ly words and –ing words.

32. T: And where did she use them?

33. S13: Glistening at the start of the sentence.

34. T: Good, the start of the sentence to really vary the sentence. Excellent and I am hoping she used commas correctly. Obviously when I mark it, I'll have a look but it sounds fantastic.

*(Two more students took part of these exchanges and then, the lesson ended [01:43:05]).*

In my view, Carolyn's efforts at implementing some forms of peer assessment had some potential in terms of feedback. However, this episode revealed a

number of issues that might have restricted the possibilities for students to develop a broader understanding of quality and hence, to learn how to communicate it to their peers. It seems that the pupils struggled when attempting to elaborate more descriptive judgements. This raises questions about to what extent the prompts given by the teacher, in terms of identifying features or seeking concrete examples within another student's work, helped or hindered the learners' autonomy and the exploration of more complex aspects of quality writing. Consequently, the data appear to reflect that the teacher was adhering to certain techniques, following more '*the letter*' and less the '*spirit*' (Marshall & Drummond, 2007) of Assessment for learning.

#### **6.4.3 Teacher's perspective**

In this subsection, I examine interview data in order to explore some of the teacher's reflections on her assessment practices within her lessons. As with the other participant teachers, Carolyn was interviewed formally and informally at different stages. On two occasions, this took the form of brief post-lesson conversations: file: 711-0045; on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2013; file: 711-0067; on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2013. A formal interview, which lasted around 20 minutes, was carried out on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2014. The data were collected within two weeks after the main episodes discussed in the previous section and sometimes immediately after the particular lesson.

The teacher interview added some insights that allowed for better understanding regarding the orientation of her feedback practices. Two relevant issues can be identified from Carolyn's account, the first of which is in relation to how she saw the role of peer assessment activities and the assessment criteria checklist and what affect this had on the development of the learners' autonomy. The second aspect explored is the extent to which the teacher's views about learning and assessment might have influenced the ways in which she enacted feedback inside the classroom.

- Peer assessment versus the criteria check list

My observation data showed that opportunities for students providing verbal and written comments about their peers were not unusual. This sort of activity formed the basis of the episodes where peer assessment and feedback was intended, within the organisational context of whole class teaching. The analysis in the earlier subsection brought to light some issues regarding the ways that these strategies were enacted. One of these is regarding the purpose of the feedback, for often the balance was more towards correctness, rather than exploring further understanding and hence, the extent to which it was helping the students to develop a sense of what quality meant became problematic as in some instances it seemed to be discussed against others' performance.

In her formal interview, Carolyn was asked to elaborate upon this matter by commenting on the episodes 10 and 11 (subsection 6.4.2). She reported her beliefs and values in relation to the benefits of peer-assessment and the work with assessment criteria for her class as follows:

*'... I find the success criteria list, ticking it, more helpful than peer assessment just because I'm better ... the peer marking it, it is difficult for them when they have only got a short amount of time to read it, it is difficult for them because they are not a teacher, they haven't got that skill of giving that immediate feedback quickly. So, I think that is the challenge of that strategy, I think, of getting ... I prefer ... I would always include the success criteria but I might not ... I wouldn't always do this, I wouldn't always do peer assessment.'* (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-2: 5-6)

Carolyn seemed not to believe in the potential of peer assessment in order to make accessible notions of quality of work to her students. It could be inferred from her explanation that, the responsibility for peer-marking not working lay with the pupils, in that she considered them not skilled enough to deal with this strategy; a perspective that would appear to be in line with entity theories of learning (Dweck, 2000). Moreover, the great fondness for the criteria checklist, over peer assessment, suggests that Carolyn was translating into practice a more '*analytic approach*' (Sadler, 1989:132) of formative assessment, one where quality is delineated through fixed criteria. This, in turn, can serve to explain why some of the interactions examined in the earlier section seem to have been driven by different and competing aims. See, for example, episode 10 (subsection 6.4.2), where the students were invited to

provide feedback to their peers through the use of some open questions, in the beginning, such as *what did you hear? What did you notice?*. This prompted more descriptive judgments. However, the sequences were progressively narrowed and the pupils were subsequently asked to respond to queries such as ...*'What stayed the same? Whichever one you want'...*, which seemed to trigger guessing about what features were still missing for the task of performing the poem. As a result of this way of questioning, during the second part of the interaction, the criteria listed on the flipchart acquired more relevance in terms of what constituted quality. In other words, rather than working it out for themselves, they seemed to become more reliant on the teacher's judgment as to what quality meant.

It could be said that the choices made by Carolyn, within her lessons, bounded the possibilities for learners' autonomy and this idea seemed to prevail in spite of the teacher's concern about this issue, as shown in this extract taken from lesson 4 (file: 711-0067; on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2013):

*[00:03:16] T: I think some of you, especially in writing, are being way too dependent on me, TA1 and TA2. Far too dependent, to the point where we are almost giving you the sentences. It shouldn't be like that, because actually the work that is in your book isn't your own, it is my work. That is not how it should be ...so you need really work during the planning stage, which I supported you in yesterday. [00:03:46]*

While Carolyn had a rhetorical commitment to giving the pupils greater independence in their learning process, my observation data also reflected that this message did not remain strong enough in the actual conduct of the classroom. However, the above segment appears to show a sense of frustration on the part of the teacher, whereby she lamented that students were not taking ownership of their work, which is a key goal of formative assessment. Bearing this in mind, I subsequently asked her how she saw Assessment *for* learning went through her lessons:

*'Yes, because I think it's ... In my eyes, assessment for learning is about giving them the chance to assess their work and me the chance to assess their work and then working out what they need to do next. What they have not done well and what they could do even better next time. So by laying it out like this, it makes it very clear to them what they have done and whether I agree, because sometimes*

*they think they've done it and I am like, no, you haven't done it enough or you need to keep working on it' ... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 8)*

The utterance above suggests that Carolyn was working with a view of feedback and formative assessment different to that proposed in the literature. It can be seen that she stated...*'In my eyes'* and so, this is her own version. Her comment about Assessment *for* learning being about what to do next appears to fit with the notion of next steps. However, she followed this up with a statement which seems to be aligned with a sense of testing in terms of what had been achieved and what not in order to determine what still needed to be done to meet all the task demands. These requirements had been already specified within a list aimed at helping the students with their visualisation. However, the teacher's expressions ...*'whether I agree'.../ they think they've done it and I am like, no, you haven't done it enough'*...could be a sign that the definitive judgment about the quality of work would always lie in the teacher's hands.

The point of view expressed by the teacher in *episode 11* (See subsection 6.4.2), where the activity of peer assessment and feedback appears to have been taken over by the idea of testing, helps to explain why this happened. Carolyn indicated that these strategies were useful in terms of getting more pupils participating within the interactions, but she did not characterise the sequences as encouraging reflection:

*And then again, it is just getting everyone involved and that was when I said to S13, you can't just say oh they are using good vocabulary because that is too broad, it is too vague so... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-2: 4-5)*

It could be said that, when Carolyn stated that peer assessment and feedback could be another opportunity for her to check on understanding, she appeared to signify testing of what pupils knew, and it gave me the impression that this last notion permeated her approach:

*...Sometimes it works better with some children than others but if they do give good feedback or I agree with them, then it shows me they have understood what makes a really good piece of descriptive writing. (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-2: 5)*

- Assessment and learning

As the formative purpose of feedback did not appear completely transparent within the lessons observed and within the teacher's descriptions so far, she was asked to provide more details in relation to her teaching and the link with her assessment practices. Regarding which, when she was talking about how she decided on criteria for quality, she explained:

*... I always try and make my lessons – they should be really clear by the end of the lesson that they are the things that they need to include, they're the features ... I kind of know from writing them myself what I would expect to see in a story or what I would expect to see in a letter and then that's how you break it all down for them so that they can look at it and say, "Right, so have I done this? Yes." Or, "No, I haven't. I need to go back and change it." (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 1)*

By focusing on the idea of *... 'that's how you break it all down for them'* it could be said that the teacher expected her pupils accomplished numerous features that were defined in a task. This leads to me referring back to the episode 9 discussed in an earlier subsection (6.4.1), where the teacher was modelling how to produce a descriptive text. On that occasion, different elements were treated separately, first personification, then effective verbs, alliterations and so on. Hence, the whole complex aim of writing this sort of text was decomposed into different parts and 'they were practiced and reinforced and subsequently build upon' (James, 2006: 54). This might have involved a sense of hierarchy in the ways pupils learnt. Carolyn also collected information about whether learning took place, in a linear manner, i.e. personification followed by metaphor etc. and then asked the students to identify some examples in a piece of writing. Consequently, it could be argued that there were some points of connection with behaviourist theories of learning.

This intersection between learning and assessment adds insights into how Carolyn's interpretation of Assessment for learning was shaped. From her account, it can be seen that the boundaries between feedback, testing and performance were frequently blurred, as the excerpt below illustrates:



*Yes, well I think in a way, assessment for learning, the students always have to prove that they've learned it, so there is this whole idea of you have got this learning objective... so they have to prove that they've achieved that learning objective. And I think that's where the assessment for learning comes in because it helps them to prove that they've learnt it because they are constantly thinking about what they are doing, whether it is meeting the learning objective and then what they need to do differently in order to meet it next time.'*  
(Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:11)

Generally, the teacher's reflections on her lessons would appear to reveal different factors that drove her actions when providing feedback to her learners inside the classroom. In particular, her view of pupils' capability to understand quality undermined the potential for peer assessment and feedback. The intentions behind the activities implemented, as described by Carolyn, had more similarities with ideas of testing and hence, appeared to be more performance oriented and less about promoting formative action.

#### **6.4.4 Summary**

Regarding Carolyn's feedback practices, in the context of spoken interaction, the following dimensions were identified. In the actual conduct of the classroom, the teacher implemented modelling, peer assessment and feedback. The episodes showed that competing priorities were at play. Carolyn was, in a way, sampling the understanding of the class as well as using individual students' responses to make clearer what criteria were involved within the task. The sequences have also illustrated that while pupils were encouraged to comment on their peers' work, the possibilities for providing qualitative judgments were restricted, rather than enhanced. This raises the question whether or not the feedback was helping the students to become more independent in their learning.

The interview data have provided insights into the teacher's view of assessment for learning. From her explanations, it could be surmised that feedback was concentrated on testing what had been achieved and then focusing on what was still missing in order to meet the objective. This resonates with the notion of making judgments about quality by decomposing different aspects of a piece of work, which in turn seem to be linked with a view of how these elements should be taught and learnt.

## 6.5 Carolyn's approach to written forms of feedback

Carolyn's account regarding her written forms of feedback covered the following issues: the place given to the correction of basic errors; how she provided feedback related to content as from the messages conveyed through written comments; and her approach to the use of success criteria.

### 6.5.1 Correcting basic errors

While the basics of the writing, such as punctuation or grammar errors, can be continuously assessed, they should not be the centrality, according to this teacher's initial description of the marking procedures. She seemed to have developed the view that these were elements easily identified by the children and that there were others that were harder to grasp. Hence, feedback should be centred on those more complex aspects of quality:

*...because things like this, that's an on-going target, using full stops and capital letters, so they have been trying to do that since the beginning of year 5...they should know what third person is...there are some things like these-some children will not know, they will struggle and you need to pinpoint those... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 1)*

In this passage, clearly Carolyn expected the pupils to know the basics when pupils faced written assignments, such as when she said: '*they should know what third person is*'. However, in practice, when marking the pupils' books, if she found evidence of some students having difficulties related to what could be labelled as basic writing aspects, she would thoroughly underline these sorts of problems as well as providing written comments about which still needed to be corrected, as the following shows:

*... I read the work and then, so with this piece of work it was obvious she hadn't read over the work, so she has got massive problems with punctuation. I don't think she really understands where to put the punctuation. So I have put, "A lot of your writing is not punctuated at all which makes it difficult to follow," because it does disrupt the flow so it is just highlighting to her that it is a problem not punctuating her work... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 5)*

Thus, the teacher's intention, as reported by her, was not entirely reflected in terms of her enactment of marking. She seemed to be preoccupied with correcting grammar, punctuation and spelling and these technical aspects of the children's work appeared to take on more importance than she would have liked to have given them.

### 6.5.2 Feedback related to content

When Carolyn described her work in relation to devising written comments, she identified the intended purposes, that is, what she tried to convey to the students, and what aspects of the writing should be assessed. The teacher reported that written comments should be used to:

- inform the student whether he/she has achieved the learning goal in a specific writing task:

*... So, if the learning objective, for example for that lesson, is about using imagery, then you would write really good uses of personification or similes or things like that, to show that you recognise that they've met the learning objective. (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 2).*

- provide positive encouragement:

*I normally do something positive, something they have done well, but what we do is, we highlight. All the yellow is what I really like, so what I have highlighted, the children know that it is a good thing.... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 4).*

Looking at the two extracts above together, it could be said that Carolyn did not like to say unequivocally, 'Well done', but rather, wanted to be more specific in her observation by identifying the features within the piece of writing that were indicative of achievement.

- give the next step:

Carolyn believed strongly in signalling next steps to the learner in her written comments:

'But the main purpose of this is actually to tell them what they need to do to improve, so what they need to do to make it even better really. But it is nice to give them something good to start with (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School.CS3. Int-1: 4). The participant teacher provided more detail on what underpinned the purpose of 'giving the next step', but what she meant by this I had difficulty understanding. To a certain extent, she identified the next steps by what was missing, which sometimes related to punctuation errors, whilst at other times pertained to the use of tenses, depending on the particular piece of work presented by each child:

... So , you need to read through everything and make sure that your comments are relevant to their work really. Like this boy, I can see he is really trying to use commas and full stops so I put that, because he's been working on it. But his problem is tenses, so he kept going from past to present tense. So, they have all got slightly different things that they are not doing right; so it is just trying to keep on top of it all. (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 6)

There were also signs of interpreting the next step as pointing out what needed to be corrected, such as in the utterance above: *'they have all got slightly different things that they are not doing right'*. Consequently, what was wrong with the students' work acquired more relevance within the teacher's feedback in the form of her written comments regarding next steps.

Figure 6.1 below illustrates written comments created by this teacher, which relate to a piece of writing from one of her Y5 students. The content was about a particular type of text called *'Mysterious setting description'* and the text created by the pupil was titled *'The forbidden forest'*.

Just me. I crept as <sup>quiet</sup> ~~quiet~~ as a  
 mouse <sup>and</sup> ~~I~~ saw shadows from the  
 trees ~~singers~~. I heard streams from  
 the distance. While I crept through  
 the path or where the witch  
 lived, I froze with <sup>terror</sup> ~~terro~~ on my  
 face. An insect <sup>crawled</sup> ~~croled~~ up my spine ~~a~~.  
 I felt a shiver ~~down~~ my spine.  
~~While~~ I walked on the same  
 path that was <sup>and</sup> ~~when~~ I felt  
 the <sup>terror</sup> ~~terro~~. I ~~rea~~knocked on the door

**Teacher's comment:**

*[Name of student], you have such imaginative ideas and have used some effective verbs and figurative language.*

*However, you are not punctuating your writing correctly and it is difficult to follow at times. During booster we will practise punctuating pieces of text.*

*Well done for trying to vary your sentence openers.*

*[Teacher's signature]*

Figure 6.1 Example of a writing task and the feedback provided. Y5 - student.

Carolyn- Class Teacher.

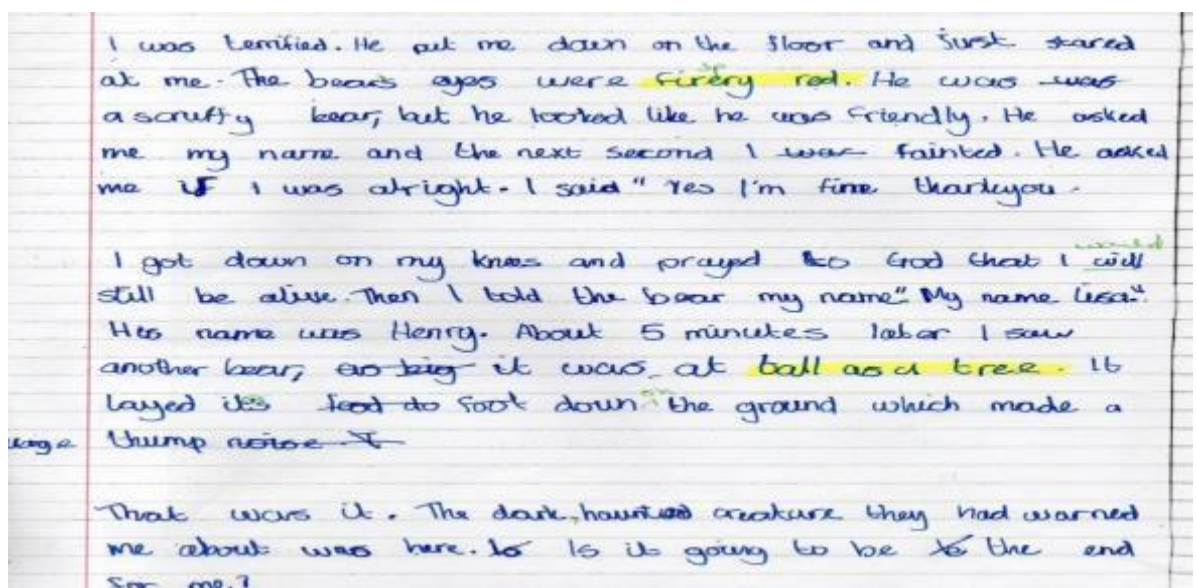
By and large, when devising comments, Carolyn focused, on the one hand, on specific writing skills to produce some types of texts, for instance, how to include figurative language of relevance to the purpose and context when describing a mysterious setting. On the other hand, she also noted some features that were concerned with language clarity. It can be seen that her feedback was about content and she took care to spell out what the pupil had achieved and what she/he had not in relation to the learning objectives.

### 6.5.3 Recognising quality in a piece of writing: what students can do?

Carolyn reported in her interview that she had developed the practice of introducing a list of success criteria for each piece of marked writing. In this way, she intended to make the criteria transparent to the learners '...they should be really clear by the end of the lesson that they are the things that they need to include, they're the features...' (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 1). Regarding decisions about what criteria to consider, she prioritised distinctive features consistent with the purpose, context and structure of different types of texts:

*... It was mainly looking at figurative language so most of the criteria had something to do with similes, metaphors, different types of figurative language. But maybe if it was a newspaper report, for example, you may vary the criteria, so that they're not expected to quote from a professional or things like that, that is more about the specific writing skills... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 5)*

In what follows, I introduce one example from a student's book, which helps to contextualise the teacher's description on this matter (see figure 6.2). The learning objective stated for this piece of writing was 'To be able to write a mysterious setting description'. The pupil missed out including the title of the work, as shown in the example below.



I was terrified. He put me down on the floor and just stared at me. The bear's eyes were fiery red. He was ~~was~~ a scruffy bear, but he looked like he was friendly. He asked me my name and the next second I ~~was~~ fainted. He asked me ~~if~~ I was alright. I said "Yes I'm fine thank you."

I got down on my knees and prayed ~~to~~ God that I ~~will~~ <sup>would</sup> still be alive. Then I told the bear my name "My name Lisa". His name was Henry. About 5 minutes later I saw another bear, ~~as big~~ it was as big as a tree. It layed its ~~foot~~ <sup>feet</sup> down ~~the~~ <sup>on</sup> the ground which made a large thump noise.

That was it. The dark, ~~haunted~~ creature they had warned me about was here. ~~Is~~ Is it going to be ~~to~~ the end for me?

### Success Criteria for Writing a Mysterious Setting Description

Pupil		Teacher
✓	Have I written in the first person? ✓ s s	✓
✓	Have I used capital letters and full stops consistently? ✓ s s	Not yet consistently
½	Have I used figurative language (e.g. personification, adverbs, effective verbs, similes, adjectives)? X s s	✓ Mainly adjectives
✓	Have I built tension by varying my sentence length? ✓ s s	✓ ?
✓	Have I varied my sentence openers (e.g. As, time connectives, -ly and -ing words)? X s s	✓
✓	Have I followed my plan? ✓	No plan provided
✓	Have I written in the past tense consistently? ✓ s s	✓
1/2	Have I written about the senses? X s s	✓
✓	Have I included emotions in my writing? ✓ s s	✓

#### Peer's comments:

WWW: (What went well) Varied sentence length.

WWW: Used adjectives to describe characters.

EBI: (even better if) Put tension in your writing and correct your punctuation.

#### Teacher's comments:

[Name of student], I agree with [Name of student]. I can see that you have tried to vary your sentence length; however, I don't feel that you built tension through the actual things that happened during the walk through the forest.

Well done for using paragraphs, [Teacher's signature]

Student: Thank You!

Figure 6.2 Example of a writing task and the feedback provided. Y5-student . Carolyn-Class Teacher.

From the excerpt above, it would appear that the teacher also tried to incorporate some forms of self-and-peer-assessment, which involved asking the children to check whether itemised features were present or absent within the piece of writing. However, figure 6.2 seems to suggest that the pupil's understanding of the success criteria was different to that of the teacher. In addition, the feedback from the peer (through comments) appeared contradictory to their own judgments as shown in the middle column of the check list table. So, from the data, it would seem that the pupils found it difficult to comprehend the criteria.

Carolyn, in her interview, did not specifically describe the success criteria table as a formative practice, but rather, she identified it as being a general assessment procedure ...it is quite general really but it is mainly for... It's for me to see what they can do, but it's really to keep them on track ... so it's for them to constantly say, 'I haven't used alliteration, so next time when I write a character description I

*need to use alliteration, because I didn't use it.'* (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 2). This suggests that this teacher, rather than using this system in a formative way, followed it to determine whether or not a particular criterion had been demonstrated within a piece of writing and also, for reminding students what to include in the next piece of work.

From the interview emerged a similar notion to that observed in figure 6.2, namely, while the children could check which features were present or absent within their piece of writing, or even when they commented on their peers' work, it could not be ascertained whether they actually understood the meaning of the criteria involved. When the teacher was asked to elaborate on this matter, she pointed out:

*You don't really. The only way you could do it is pairing them by ability, so put the highest with the highest and get them to ... And then the lowers have support during that process, so have a teacher there or have a TA there to make sure that they're marking it right. But this is the thing, this is very much in my opinion, the higher abilities are much better at doing that than the lower abilities because they find it hard to write in general so commenting is quite a difficult thing for them...* (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1: 3)

The utterance above illustrates how Carolyn differentiated the children into lower and higher ability, such that she believed only the latter could understand what quality meant in a piece of writing. She also contended that even if lower achievers could grasp the concept to some degree, most of her class would have great difficulty in articulating aspects of quality and communicating them to others in written form. The teacher made reference to this matter repeatedly, sometimes by spotlighting the obstacles when performing peer marking and on other occasions, when reflecting upon the overarching purpose of the implementation of success criteria.

*Again...I do think sometimes some children don't benefit from it. It is normally those children who are lower-attainers ...So actually in an ideal world you would have a very simple success criteria for those children, because in a way it is quite unfair to give them all of these things to include when they may not be able to...* (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 5)



Thus, the interview data suggest that Carolyn considered the learning objective was attainable for some of her students, but there were others who would be well off the expected level and hence, would need more help from her or support from the teaching assistant. Consequently, the success criteria might have been interpreted as standards to meet in order to present the work, rather than a description of quality to be considered as scaffolding to guide the process of the pupils' writing (Sadler, 2007):

*... you can't ignore the fact that in a piece of descriptive writing you do need figurative language, you do, for it to be a good piece of work You can't really just pretend that they don't have to include it because they can try – they can include adjectives or a more basic level of figurative language rather than personification or whatever it is... So, it is knowing what the children can do and being realistic.... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 5)*

All in all, it would appear that the teacher's interpretation of her work with success criteria seemed more oriented to aiding student performance.

#### **6.5.4 Summary**

Carolyn's approach to written forms of feedback can be summarised with reference to the following issues. While the participant teacher sketched out the notion that feedback should not emphasise the basics of the writing, namely, spelling and punctuation, she; however, would pay attention to all those kind of errors, if that was deemed appropriate for an individual student. Indeed, when she described her own practices on this matter, she illustrated how these kinds of errors were pointed out to the students using detailed written comments and not just the common highlighting tools. Subsequently, a difference emerged between her declared purpose and what she did in practice, which appeared to be driven by her prioritising: taking care to spell out what her students achieved and had not achieved in every piece of writing.

The feedback by comments informed the students whether they had met the learning objective; provided positive encouragement; and gave the next step to the learners. The data have suggested that Carolyn's idea of quality work in literacy seemed to emphasise those features that serve the purpose, context and structure of different types of texts. Specifically, she would establish criteria to assess a character

description, a newspaper report, or a letter etc. and then make comments according to these criteria as well as checking whether a piece of writing had met them.

In addition to highlighting procedures and providing comments, Carolyn used another tool as a form of communicating quality to students, which was a table check list in which she separated for the students different aspects to be assessed in a piece of work. While the teacher precisely indicated her expectations about what counted as good work, the data seem to suggest that this procedure did not help the students in recognising what makes a good piece of writing. The teacher reflected on this matter during her interview and pointed out that in her view some students might not be able to identify aspects of quality within their writing and hence, describe them to others when undertaking peer- assessment; a notion that was accentuated when she was talking about low ability children. Generally, the approach to communicating success criteria to her students involved checking what was in the work and what not, but the spaces for developing understanding appeared to be limited.

## Chapter 7

### Lily, Class Teacher, St. Thomas's Primary School

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter commences with general information about Lily's work on feedback and formative assessment. This is followed by the results section comprising several subsections, the first of which, refers to observation data and presents the analysis of selected classroom episodes where there was potential for feedback to occur. This is complemented by the analysis of follow up interviews aimed at gathering the reflections of the teacher regarding her assessment practices in her lessons. Subsequently, there is a summary of the main insights that emerged from this participant teacher's feedback whilst engaging in spoken interaction. Finally, Lily's approach to written forms of feedback is discussed by drawing upon the analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interview and examples of marking in students' books.

#### 7.2 Marking Policy - St. Thomas's Primary School

Lily worked at the same school as Carolyn, the third participant teacher of this study; therefore, the same description of the school feedback policy applies. (See Chapter 6; Section: 6.2)

#### 7.3 Lily- Class Teacher

Lily saw it as being important to participate in the staff training days where the marking procedures were discussed and agreed. She pointed out that it provided her with the opportunity to know how others implemented feedback and thus, be able to develop good practices. From her point of view, these training opportunities also influenced the school's policy concerning written feedback:

*... 'we have staff training days and after school meetings where we discuss it. We get together and we look at each other's marking and we agree what works well, what doesn't work well and that helps us come together to form a policy for that' (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:2).*

The basis for the discussion was the material compiled by the subject coordinators, which showed examples of children's work with different forms of marking. In this regard, Lily pointed out that an example of feedback practice was identified as effective according to the extent that students responded to it and whether they were able to move their learning forward:

*...And found that that was effective, and showing evidence that the children were responding to marking and it was moving their learning on. So, we thought, as a school, that all of us should be doing that so that it's consistent across every year group. And if it benefits the child, of course we'll be doing it. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:8)*

The two next sections are intended to provide rich data reflecting a range of this teacher's feedback practice in terms of spoken interaction and with reference to written work.

#### **7.4 Lily's enactment of feedback practices inside the classroom**

##### **7.4.1 Feedback before/during the engagement with the task**

In this subsection, I examine two classroom episodes to illustrate Lily's feedback practices. She is the fourth participant teacher and as already noted, she was working in the same school as Carolyn (the third participant teacher) at the time of my data collection. I have looked at 'Discussion-Content' phase episodes in the interactional context of whole class-teaching. As shown in the transcripts below, the teacher attempted to gather information about how her students were interpreting the tasks. She tried to get the students to develop an idea of what they should do by providing them with the opportunities for understanding it through the discussion.

The analysis focuses on the nature of the exchanges, with the aim being to determine whether they were to do with providing pupils with prompts of what needed to be done in order to complete the task at hand or whether they emphasised the enhancement of the quality of future work (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003). Observation of the interaction between Lily and her students during classroom discourse can reveal whether the enacted practices promoted or limited feedback opportunities. I pay attention to how the teacher's questions were framed and the

ways in which she seemed to have interpreted those of the students as well as their responses. This is aimed at achieving an understanding of what was elicited from the students (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Leung, 2004) in addition to shedding light on the areas in which feedback was focused within this teacher's lessons.

The analysis of each selected piece of data (assessment events or episodes) is preceded by an outline of the corresponding observed lesson. It comprises a description of the main phases with the specific aims and the activities carried out. This is intended to contextualise the issues that shape the interaction within the episodes that are brought in for examination.

- *Lesson context concerning Episode 12*

This pertains to the fourth lesson observed in Lily's class on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 (file: 711-0099). The learning objective for this lesson was '*I can write the opening of my fantasy story*'. During the Introduction-phase, Lily got her class to recap the previous lesson, where they had started the planning of this writing task, which needed to be finished by the end of the week. This was done within Question & Answer interaction, which was aimed at developing the students' understanding by getting them to talk about those elements that would help in devising the opening of their own fantasy stories. Lily encouraged her students to think about: 'How to have the reader expecting what is going to happen next, What is going to happen to their characters? What magical fantasy is going to appear?' [00:02:29]. She used some examples, one from a literary book, which the pupils had read (The Chronicles of Narnia; The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe –chapter 1). The other had to do with a story she made up using some of the students' names as characters. Both examples were intended to illustrate how the suspense was progressively created by emphasising how the setting of the scene was made and she collated ideas from the pupils to address this [00:04:08]. Following these sequences of interaction, Lily summarised the issues discussed so far and signalled that they needed to start to talk about how to sort out these themes in relation to their own pieces of writing [00:07:50].

The teacher and her class then engaged in Question & Answer to talk about how effectively to build up tension for their story openings. The pupils explained what they had done so far by considering their previous notes, their planning and attempts at writing. Within these sequences is located Episode 12 that I have singled out for analysis below.

- *Episode 12: Who can talk me through how we're going to write the opening of our story?*

The following extract is taken from lesson 4; Discussion-content-phase (file 711-0099; on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2013) within the lesson context provided above.

1. So, you're going to describe your characters, before, the setting. And then, you can move up onto the suspense. The suspense. So, when it builds up, [...], when it builds up, you'll have a problem, and the discovery of the fantasy, okay? S7?
2. S7: Usually I get more information in the introduction and it builds up, so when you start making your stories, you just go straight to talk about that I have got pets?
3. T: You could do, yeah. You could talk about your character's pets as well. It's up to you, what they like to do, or what they did the night before, what they did the day before the big thing happened. There's a lot of fidgeting going on. [...] S17?
4. S17: I think, if we haven't got a pet in our story, or in our plan, is that okay?
5. T: Absolutely. Who can talk me through how we're going to write the opening of our story? Nice and clearly. S2?
6. S2: First, you're going to introduce your character and where the story is set. And you're going to work out how it's done- the- before the problem.
7. T: So, what your character does, before the problem, what they're like. It provides the reader with a lot more extra information about what they like doing, what they were doing before the big problem happened, S9?

Lily started the sequence by emphasising the idea of progressively building up tension when the students approached the task of writing the opening of their fantasy stories (line 1) This seemed to be a complex aspect of quality writing that required from children the ability to hint subtly that something might occur, by describing their characters and setting the scene, but not to jump straight into the main event. S7 spontaneously formulated a question, which reflected that she/he already had thought and sketched out the piece of writing. It seemed that this pupil wanted to talk about her/his characters (pets), not necessarily at the beginning of the story (line2). Lily accepted S7's motion as an alternative idea, but she also gave additional guidance, as she was concerned with clarifying that the key point was about creating suspense (line 3).

Next, S17 wanted confirmation that the inclusion of pets within the story was not a requirement of the task (line 4). The teacher acknowledged it as a correct assumption and said, raising her voice intonation: ...*'Absolutely'*.... This small act might have signalled Lily's purpose in terms of getting her students to understand that they could choose and decide on the characters as well as the setting of their stories. However, she stressed that whatever the variations pupils should always keep in mind the core notion of building up suspense. This message was marked in the query posed by Lily: ...*'Who can talk me through how we're going to write the opening of our story?'*... (line 5), which was a challenging question, as she was encouraging the pupils to describe the actual process of writing, especially when she added: ...*'Nice and clearly'*....in the same line.S2 offered an answer that highlighted the key points that were being discussed and Lily paraphrased it, in order to make the response clearer for the rest of the class (lines 6-7). It should be noted that, the teacher intervention at line 7 suggests her intention was to close the exchanges as it took the form of a summary of what had been discussed so far. However, the line of inquiry was reinitiated by another student, as follows:

8. S9: When you're on your build up, can you write like, to introduce someone else, too?
9. T: Absolutely, you don't need to, if you're building, if you've got characters

which only occur in the build-up, don't introduce them just yet, because then that adds to the magic. S17?

10. S17: So, in the build-up you can introduce another character?

11. T: Yeah, absolutely. S30? [ *S30 and other pupils, hands up, but their questions were inaudible*]

12. T: ...S4?

13. S4: We need the problem in the opening- is- if your character's evil, you must think of them and plan how they're going to kidnap someone.

14. T: That's true.

*(After this last exchange, the teacher shifted the line of inquiry towards the discussion on success criteria for this sort of writing, based on the discussion so far [00:17:08]. Next, time was allocated for writing, with some pupils coming closer to the teacher's table to show to her their work in progress [00:26:05] until the point the lesson ended [00:60:45]).*

As with the other students, within this interaction, S9 seemed to be actively engaged in trying to sort out some uncertainties about carrying out the task. The question posed by this student (line 8) might be a signal that the line of inquiry led her /him to think beyond the prompts she /he was given. For, S9's query involved a suggestion that was slightly different from what had been stated before. The teacher reacted similarly as she had done earlier to the question put forward by S7, but this time she added that to incorporate new characters, in the build-up, could benefit the writing as all of this was about a fantasy story (line 9). So, it could be said that Lily was allowing the negotiation of good quality writing, for she eagerly accepted that there was not just one fixed strategy to develop suspense.

However, Lily's interventions seemed to affect the children in different ways. S17 was attentive and interested in hearing the answers to other pupils' queries. This student appeared to be slightly surprised by the emerging ideas and wanted to ensure that she/he had understood correctly what to do. Her/his question was more about writing the frame of the story opening, rather than the purpose of the text (Wray & Lewis, 1997). For instance, when saying: ... '*So, in the build-up you can introduce another character?*'... (line 10). Unlike S17, towards the end of the interaction S4 made an



observation, which reflected her/his own interpretation of the task. This student's comment seemed to illustrate the idea of what actually did matter in deciding when to add in characters, and that the writing structure would depend on the nature of the characters themselves (line 13). So, was this Y4 pupil showing an understanding that the structure should be flexible or was she/he just wanting to be sure that the work produced so far was correct? The teacher ended the sequence by accepting S4's proposition, (line 14), thereby once again agreeing that other ways for achieving the task could work well.

This episode illustrates that Lily's pieces of advice were not completely uncontested or incontrovertible. Some pupils' questions raised significant points throughout the teaching exchanges. Consequently, what was proposed in the beginning as a frame to structure the writing task was modified and expanded upon as the sequences progressed, with the pupils being actively involved in a process of negotiation of quality. They made some unpredictable contributions and Lily's follow up moves did not just take the form of being evaluative, for they also seemed to imply invitations to explore further ideas.

The interaction also shows that not all the students perceived the teacher's feedback messages in the same way. As aforementioned, some of them tried to elaborate arguments based on different alternatives to build tension (S7, S2, S9 and S4), whereas one student (S17) seemed more concerned about following the correct schematic structure for the writing. However, whatever the case, all of these pupils' enquiries had to do with what they were actually planning to produce in their writing. From this perspective, I believe the exchanges provided them with the opportunity of reflecting on their work as an ongoing process. Consequently, the feedback was more responsive and the balance of the interaction was towards quality criteria and the teacher was trying to gain an understanding of how the pupils were interpreting the task, i.e. she was not telling them what to write. This had resonance with Sadler's (1989,2010) notion of determining quality using multicriterion judgment, by considering the actual piece of work being assessed as a whole.

- Lesson context regarding Episode 13

This corresponded to the seventh lesson observed in Lily's class on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2014 (file 711-0144). The learning objective of the lesson was I can understand the setting of stories from another cultures. In the Introduction-phase, the teacher addressed setting the main task of the lesson. First, there were short Question & Answer exchanges, asking the pupils to mention popular stories or traditional tales they knew and to tell the moral they had learnt from them. Following these interactions, Lily announced they would be looking at a story that was set in Japan, which is one amongst other books that they would be studying in other lessons: ... 'so we are going to be looking at a story called Urashima Tarō, okay?...That's what our topic for literacy is about, stories from other cultures' ...[00:04:26].

Then, the teacher read the story aloud and when she had finished it she encouraged her class to comment and brainstorm ideas on different parts of the story. Some of the questions she posed to guide the discussion included: 'What would you have done?', 'Why do you think the sea princess gave him the box?' Progressively, Lily was trying to get her pupils to elaborate or to hypothesise about what would be the reasons that triggered the main events within the story. This is the specific part of the sequences from where I have extracted Episode 13 that is analysed below. It portrays a range of pupils' conjectures about the events within the book that was under examination and the feedback provided by the teacher.

- *Episode 13: S18 thought the box was the reason-why-explain that bit further...*

This extract is taken from lesson 7 'Discussion content-phase' (file 711 0144; on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2014) and it was preceded by the lesson content provided above. In what follows I give a brief synopsis of the story *Urashima Tarō*:

*While Tarō was walking along the beach he saw that some boys had caught a turtle. He saved the turtle and put it back in the sea. Some days later, the turtle told him that the Sea Princess was very grateful for what he had done and she invited him to visit the bottom of the sea. Tarō accepted the invitation and felt happy living there, until he began to be lonely for his home and wanted to come*

*back. The Sea Princess gave him a beautiful box and warned him- 'don't open this ever, if you do, you won't be able to come back to see me'- When he got to the beach, he could no longer find his own house and nobody recognised him. Tarō was very puzzled and he could not resist opening the box. Then he discovered that his face was all wrinkled and actually he had spent many years at the bottom of the sea, not just a few days.*

1. S18: I thought that the box made all of that happen.
2. T: Oh! Interesting. S18 thought that the box was the reason- why-. Explain that bit further, S18.
3. S18: That his house was...
4. T: S18? - S4?
5. S4: That his box was a time machine.
6. T: Was it like a portal?
7. S4: Yes.
8. T: S18, if you can't explain it to us... / S8 hand up/ S8?
9. S8: I think I know what she means. I think she means that if he opened the box, then what happened would happen. Like when all his friends and family died.
10. T: Okay. S5?
11. S5: I think S18 was trying to say that when he took the box, something happened to the land and made all his family and friends die.
12. T: Oh! So the box had something to do as well with the reason why he had no family and friends. So, the Sea Princess had a really horrible trick.
13. S6: I think the Sea Princess might not have been nice.
14. T: Yes, she might not have been nice.
15. S15: I think that the Sea Princess was nice, but she wanted to have Tarō, because when he [inaudible: 00:21:27], but I think the Princess might have actually been good, but time went much, much quicker in the sea than on the land.
16. T: Yes, it's true. And this is what we're going to be doing today. So today, what you guys will be doing is you're going to be retelling the story, but you are going to choose the ending of the story...

*(Following these sequences, Question & Answers were carried out, encouraging the pupils, first, to describe orally some possible alternative endings. Then time was allocated for writing [00:32:14], with the teacher moving around the tables making suggestions to specific students. After that Lily indicated the task should be continued in other session and the lesson ended [00:59:27]).*

S18 formulated an explanation of what might have caused the events within Tarō's story (line 1) and the first part of these exchanges evolved around this. The teacher posed a question trying to elicit the refinement of S18's response (line 2), but the pupil seemed to struggle to explain further her/ his idea (line 3). Then, S4 offered her/his own theory about the magic box. Next, in line 8, the teacher persisted with her intention of gaining an extended answer from S 18, which still did not emerge. This act was followed by two students' spontaneous interventions, both claiming they knew what S18 was trying to convey: ... 'I think I know what she means...'... (S8, line 9), or: ...'I think S18 was trying to say that ...'... (S5, line 11) These students seemed to be familiar with joining in with the discussion in this way. Next, drawing on S5's idea, the teacher used a follow up to stimulate more students to take part in the interaction that involved directing their attention towards another character of the story (the Sea Princess), suggesting that she might have had bad intentions (line 12).

Two pupils participated in the last part of the exchanges. S6 agreed with the teacher regarding the idea that the Sea Princess was not nice (line 13), whilst S15 argued against this notion by providing the reasoning that led her/ him to think that what happened in the story was not the Sea Princess's fault. She/ he contended that it might be the case that time ran differently between on the land and under the sea (line 15). The teacher acknowledged both positions as equally acceptable (line 14 and 16). This shows that she was not expecting right or wrong answers, but rather, encouraging the students to advance ideas that they could use when they moved on to the next task, which was about retelling the story but incorporating their own chosen ending.

Throughout this episode, Lily's line of questioning meant that the pupils engaged with peers' ideas and consequently, their contributions were threaded together. The exchanges also illustrate the teacher's persistence in getting pupils to explain what

they were thinking. In sum, the strategy she used was one aimed at helping students to make sense or to develop an understanding that would be helpful in future tasks.

- *Lesson context relating Episode 14*

This relates to the fifth lesson observed in Lily's class on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2014 (711-0105). The learning objective of the lesson was 'I can use paragraphs in my writing'. The introduction-phase was used essentially to communicate this aim and they were to use an extract from '*Where the Wild Things Are*' by Maurice Sendak as an example that could help them in achieving this purpose when carried out their writing task. The teacher read aloud a selected extract from this book. Then, she wrote on the whiteboard both: some phrases that represented the main points of the story and a list of sentence starters to be used in order to link those points, such as: '*later that night*', '*quite suddenly*', '*a life time later*' [00:14:02]. This activity was intended for students to match them up in a coherent way and from there to write a more detailed description, forming paragraphs. The pupils engaged in the first part of the task, reading through the propositions on the whiteboard to determine how to make the link. Lily checked this work with the whole class by asking for some pupils' contributions [00:14:08] and four participated within these sequences (S8-S9-S10-S5). Following this and before the pupils commenced the extended piece of writing (second part of the task), the teacher used Question & Answer in an attempt to get her pupils to externalise their understanding of what was involved within the process of making paragraphs [00:16:40]. From this part of the interaction I have selected Episode 14 illustrating the teacher- student sequences on this topic.

- *Episode 14: How do we know a paragraph is a paragraph?*

This extract is taken from lesson five 'Discussion content-phase' (file 711-0105; on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2014) and it was preceded by the lesson content outlined above.

1. T: ... So, what I would like you to do, who can tell me what makes a paragraph?  
How do we know a paragraph is a paragraph? What is so different about it?  
What is so different about a paragraph? S12.

2. S12: Paragraphs are different because if the sentence, if you have the whole sentence there's no gaps but if you have the paragraph you would take a gap.
3. T: So, gaps – that's a good word to describe the paragraph – gaps. S13.
4. S13: You write a few sentences then give a line to change the subject.
5. T: Fantastic, usually you should skip a line to show that it's a brand new paragraph – that's what I want you to be doing today. S14?
6. S14: Cut in a half
7. T: What do you mean cut in a half?
8. S14: When you [inaudible 00:17:40]
9. Say that again.
10. S14: When you have a lot of words and you can break it up.
11. T: Fantastic. So, it breaks up your long pieces of writing. S9?
12. S9: Instead of just saying a long piece of writing ...there's spaces in between [...]
13. T: So, there are spaces in between your writing, fantastic. What is going to be in one paragraph? Are there going to be all different types of information? What's going to be in one paragraph? S15?

S12 associated a paragraph with the idea of producing a break or a space in a piece of writing (line 2), whilst S13's intervention was about the purpose of writing paragraphs, whereby she /he seemed to understand that the key point was to talk about a single topic (line 4). The teacher acknowledged both answers, but she chose not to highlight, yet, the distinction made by S13. Instead, she paraphrased this student's response by focusing on the strategy of leaving out a line to explain how paragraphs can be separated. It seemed that Lily wanted more pupils to participate and articulate their thinking, before closing the sequence (Black et al., 2003). Next, two more students made contributions by returning to the notion already sketched by S12, such that paragraphs involve breaking up long pieces of writing.

Then, by the end of these exchanges, Lily decided to address the line of inquiry regarding what should be the content of a paragraph (line 13). In doing so, she then referred back to the point made by S13. Line 13 is repeated below along with how the interaction continued:

13. T: So, there are spaces in between your writing, fantastic. What is going to be in one paragraph? Are there going to be all different types of information? What's going to be in one paragraph? S15.

14. S15: Each paragraph remains about one thing. For an example, your first paragraph would be about Max. What happened when Max got naughty?

15. T: Fantastic. Each paragraph should have only that certain information to do with what you are trying to explain in that one paragraph. So, our first paragraph is going to be one night Max was naughty and was sent to his room. Let's do that one together.

*(Following these exchanges, the teacher modelled one paragraph on the whiteboard collecting pupils' ideas based on the preceding tasks. Time was then allocated for independent writing [00:25:35] [01:07:06]).*

Lily posed two different questions, one open and one that appeared to elicit guessing, but she repeated the first one ... 'What's going to be in one paragraph?' (line 13) and S15 seemed to interpret this query as a request for an explanation. Accordingly, this pupil provided an answer that spotlighted the idea of writing about one topic or subject. In addition, she/he gave an example which drew on the text already worked upon by the class and the teacher (line 14). Lily gave positive feedback to S15's response and paraphrased it in order to provide a summary of the core idea to the rest of the class. Then, she moved on to the next sequence of the lesson, which was to build a model, by considering the work carried out so far (line 15).

The episode illustrates that the teacher wanted to explore to what extent her pupils had captured the main idea of what they were doing. She had already provided some templates and they had made some initial attempts, but she decided to stop for a while to encourage them to think more in depth about the principles underpinning the learning task. This meant that the balance of these exchanges was geared towards quality criteria and as such, they were not limited to just having the task completed. The interaction, as with the two previous episodes, conveyed the notion of pursuing the students' engagement in the process rather than the seeking of correct answers. Modelling appeared to be conceived of not just as a process of giving clear

instructions. However, the issue that remains unresolved is to what extent was everybody actually involved considering that the episodes took place within the interactional context of whole class teaching. Nevertheless, the teacher's intention to get all the pupils reflecting on their work plainly emerged from the observation data.

#### **7.4.2 Feedback on students' work before the completion of the final product**

This subsection does not apply for this participant teacher (See introduction 7.1).

#### **7.4.3 Teacher's perspectives**

In this subsection, I focus on interview data in order to portray some of the teacher's own reflections on her assessment practices during her lessons. As with the other three participant teachers, Lily was interviewed formally and informally at different stages. On two occasions, this was in the form of brief post-lesson conversations, for example: file: 711-0027; on 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2013, whilst a semi structured interview lasting around 20 minutes was carried out on 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2014. The data were collected within two weeks after the main episodes discussed in the previous section and sometimes immediately after the particular lesson.

A common and recurrent theme emerged throughout Lily's interview, that of the intention of providing opportunities for the children to think. This issue came across in the teacher's account, when referring to strategies such as questioning and modelling, in particular, and when she added some insights that appeared to reflect her view about learning and teaching.

- Questioning and modelling

The classroom episodes within the earlier section showed that the line of inquiry was expanded by encouraging the pupils' contributions. In her interview, Lily was asked to elaborate on this matter and she explained her approach to framing questions and how she endeavoured to manage students' answers:



*... if I want them to give an opinion I will make clear that it is not a wrong or right answer, because a lot of the children, they don't want to give me an answer because they think I want the answer. But if I want just their opinion, if I want them to think, "oh how do you think she is feeling", then, I will say, "In your personal experience, how would you feel if that happened to you?" Things like that, so it really depends on what type of question I am asking them really ...*  
(Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-2: 4-5)

Trying to get the students to express their ideas and thinking as opposed to the elicitation of the correct answer is clearly emphasised in the above utterance. This intention was also inferred from the interaction inside the classroom, according to the episodes selected. The pupils' contributions did not only take the form of brief responses, for they also made up their own questions and on some occasions put forward their interpretation of how the task could be done. See, for example, episode 12, 'Who can talk me through how we're going to write the opening of our story?' (see subsection 7.4.1). In the above statement, there is no information about whether her aim was stimulating people to talk or provide opinions, or whether it went beyond this in that purposively devised questions with a metacognitive component that were aimed at trying to get the children to reflect on the learning processes in which they were participating.

At another point during her interview, Lily described how she addressed the modelling strategy. She made reference to lesson 5, from which I selected episode 14 'How do we know a paragraph is a paragraph' (see subsection 7.4.1). On this occasion, the idea of getting the pupils to think during the interaction was also highlighted and again, it seemed to me that what led Lily to enact modelling involved two intertwined purposes. On the one hand, it appeared to be aimed at getting the students to continue talking around the subject matter and letting them feel they were allowed to take part. On the other, she appeared to want them to use each other's ideas to devise a model for writing, so she tried to inject a sense of what the next step should be:

*...If I am modelling ... they can see what I am doing and it is just ... And it is also if they have all contributed to it, it will look... it will seem like they have got all the power, they are thinking, "I have come up with that." So that was a method that I am trying to do... more shared writing where literally we are just working*

*together as a class on what we are supposed to be doing and then, once they have seen that example, once they have seen what they need to do and because they have seen us do it together, they know what to do next. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-2: 5)*

From the above, it seems that she was trying to make the students reflect on how they would use the tools discussed (structures, aims, ideas) later in their own writing. This notion also permeated episode 12 referred the above, but in that sequence, Lily went still further, because her pieces of advice were modified by some students' spontaneous ideas and hence, the possibilities for the negotiation of quality writing were enhanced.

It could be said that, from the data, Lily attributed to questioning the foremost role in providing verbal feedback during the lessons. She felt confident in implementing this strategy and believed that it had influenced her professional development. When she was talking about the implications of a formative assessment approach in a broader sense, she indicated ... *'I think I have developed more on how to question. Definitely, my questioning has developed and my questioning especially with moving the children's learning on has developed more'* (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-2: 5).

- Children's engagement in learning

The notion of using questions to help pupils with their learning processes was further articulated by Lily. In the next utterance, she made reference to a child centred approach for discussion, which seemed also articulated in her view about how pupils should learn:

*... I think that has recently been developed across all schools to have the children lead the lesson in a way and that is so that they are more engaged so that they are more interacting, because if they are just sitting there and we are teaching, it is not ... they are not really learning. But then if they get to talk about it more, it's developing their listening skills, their reasoning skills, their speaking skills. So, I just ... no, I don't know how I learned it but, yes, it just developed really. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-2: 5)*

At first, the approach of getting more students involved during lessons was described by the teacher as being a current trend in education. She then stated that if children

were not interacting they simply were not learning. This assertion depicted how strong her belief was and how this view of learning was at the basis of her approach of questioning, despite her not necessarily being able to elaborate in words how she enacted this notion in practice.

This approach was observed often within her teaching activities, an idea that Lily emphasised at different points of her interview, pointing out that a key tenet of her teaching was giving spaces for students to think. I got the impression that children-thinking, children-learning and children-questioning were blended notions in this teacher's account:

*...well it is just that they need to be prepared first for what they need to do and I think it is always good when the children think about ...To get the children thinking, they discuss everything they know about that topic before to one another so they are sharing their ideas and then we might prepare by I will introduce what we are doing... we will do a bit of work on it together and then they go off and do it by themselves. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3: 7)*

The extract above portrays what I observed in the episodes in the earlier section, where the teacher encouraged the students describe their ideas about how they were articulating the task. In my view, these were the occasions when feedback emerged in that Lily collected evidence of the extent to which the children were able to apply what they had learnt in a new situation. It should be noted that this process was not intended as an end, but rather it served to be exploratory and hence, it had a provisional character (Marshall & Drummond, 2007).

#### **7.4.4 Summary**

Lily's approach to providing feedback within the lessons observed focused on the following dimensions.

The analysis revealed that the teacher developed an approach that addressed opportunities for children to build ideas by drawing on what others were saying. This kind of interaction involving the students taking part in the discussion was a common feature during the lessons observed. The data showed that the adoption of this approach was pursued so as to get the students to think about a topic or activity by expanding their ideas through questioning. The episodes also illustrated that the pupils

were encouraged to reflect on their work by explaining how they were interpreting the task, to focus on the process needed and she conveyed the idea that there were different paths to achieving what counts for quality (Sadler, 1989, 2007, 2010).

It was not possible to ascertain how this approach to providing feedback affected the students, in general. Some pupils appeared to be more familiar with this line of interaction, whereas others seemed to expect more hints or to be told what to do. However, the episodes illustrated that Lily did allow negotiation of quality and a number of students felt free to propose alternative ideas, engaging enthusiastically with the creation of their pieces of writing.

In terms of the areas that were emphasised, Lily focused on sharing with her students some schematic structures that might help them to achieve the purpose of different sort of texts. She also conveyed to her pupils that any frame should be considered a flexible tool (Wray & Lewis, 1997) and, hence, the purpose of the writing exercise gained more relevance. This was why, for instance, when they discussed how to write the opening of their fantasy story some students came up with alternative ways of building tension. This was an approach that required the teacher and students to become involved with more complex dimensions of formative assessment.

## **7.5 Lily's approach to written forms of feedback**

A number of key elements can be distinguished in the ways that Lily implemented the marking of her students' writing tasks. They are discussed under the following headings: correcting basic errors; feedback related to content; and recognising quality in a piece of writing: what the students can do?

### **7.5.1 Correcting basic errors**

Lily stressed the use of the highlighting procedure called 'Sunshine and Growth' alongside her comments as part of her marking system. The strategy, already described as part of the school feedback policy (See section 6.2), seemed to be focused on language expressions in order to enhance their accuracy:

*...This is what we call sunshine and growth, we use a highlighter...or a yellow felt*

*tip to underline what we like about the piece, so what we think is really good, I've underlined adverbs, adjectives, things that really make the writing really good... (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:3-4)*

In addition, the teacher mentioned the underlining of some spelling mistakes, explaining that she made the decision to select only high frequency words that were misspelt:

*...And then we use, we can just sometimes we do a few spellings. Not too many. Maybe the high frequency words... And then, at the end, we always give one positive comment and one thing that we think they should improve on. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:3-4)*

It would appear that Lily did not value the correction of basic errors as much as she did for other components of the marking. In addition, from the examples Lily showed me from her students' books, it was clear that she used the yellow pen to underline what was right more regularly than the green one signifying what was wrong.

#### **7.5.2 Feedback related to content**

The participant teacher elaborated upon her explanations about written comments by pointing out the main intended messages. In this regard, she brought to the fore three purposes: communicating what has been done well; telling the students what they were still expected to do; and asking a question:

*We always try to emphasise one really good thing about their piece of work...Something linked to their targets and what we expect from them. And the third piece is moving their learning on. So, asking them a further question about the work...So three things, usually.... (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:1)*

The feedback policy states that a minimum of one in every three pieces of work should be quality marked, as she indicated:

*...we have a feedback policy where we mark every third piece fully, so every piece should have good marking anyway, but definitely every third piece will have a question that will either ask the child for more information about maybe specifically for literacy. We might ask them a further question to extend their learning, if they haven't understood something or ask them a question that they could answer that would be easy for them, or we could ask for their opinion on something. So, that's how we ask for that... (Lily, St Thomas's*

Then, Lily stated the choices made in order to draft questions as part of her written comments. She intended to ask differentiated or individual questions attuned to the abilities of different children. The basis of her differentiation was the kind of language used; whether she considered that the recipient of the question was a higher or lower ability pupil.

*...it is tailored to each child so, for example, this child who I have got the book of in front of me, her work is of a really high standard. So I would use different language with her, more sophisticated language when talking to her and I would ask her completely different questions. While those other children, if they are one of my SEN children, some of my special needs children or just children with a lower ability, I would ask them simpler questions like ... (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:6)*

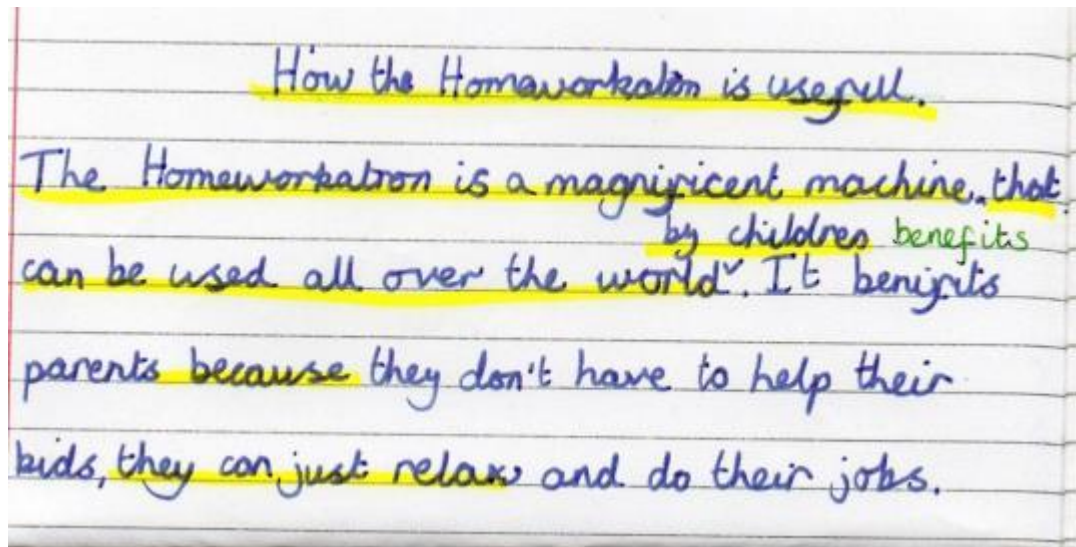
Thus, Lily seemed to believe in the effectiveness of giving the children different difficulty levels of questions according to their ability. She adapted the question to

each learner based on her previous judgement about that child's capability, endeavouring to ensure that every pupil would actually be able to respond to what they were asked. This idea was repeated by Lily elsewhere in the interview. *...So, it is always try asking them questions that I know they can answer, adapted to their ability. So, I wouldn't give every child the same question. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:6)*. Consequently, it would appear that Lily based her comments on her prior belief regarding a child's ability and set what needed to be corrected based on this.

It can be surmised that Lily valued questioning as an important area to develop practices within formative assessment. This was a recurrent theme regarding her approach within verbal forms of feedback (see subsection 7.4.3) and she also brought to the fore this topic when talking about her written comments. But, it should be also said that while she provided detail as to her marking practice, the examples from the students' books that I had access to during the research phase, illustrated a different structure for devising comments, which related to WWW and EBI.

In what follows I will incorporate an excerpt that shows the piece of writing of one Y4

student followed by the teacher's subsequent comments. The learning objective of the task was: 'To write an explanation text':



**WWW (What went well)**

*Your use of 'so' and 'because' help in the structure of your sentences and extending them.*

**EBI (Even better if)**

*You had a concluding paragraph that explained your invention, but did not repeat statements you already made.*

Figure 7.1 Example of a writing task and the feedback provided.Y4- student. Lily- Class Teacher.

While it was not possible to see the teacher's claimed approach to devising questions, this extract (figure 7.1) still helped to visualise how feedback for written work was enacted through comments.

### 7.5.3 Recognising quality in a piece of writing: what students can do?

This subsection examines the teacher's account on her use of success criteria in order to assess the quality in a piece of writing and explores what implications it might have for some forms of peer-and-self-assessment.

In the formal interview, Lily highlighted the marking ladder strategy as a tool to communicate the success criteria to the students:

*...This is something that has developed more recently with staff as we've had more staff meetings...What we've thought is really good is having these which we call success criteria or we call them marking ladders and we also, we*

*adjust these according to what we're doing with the children... (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:4)*

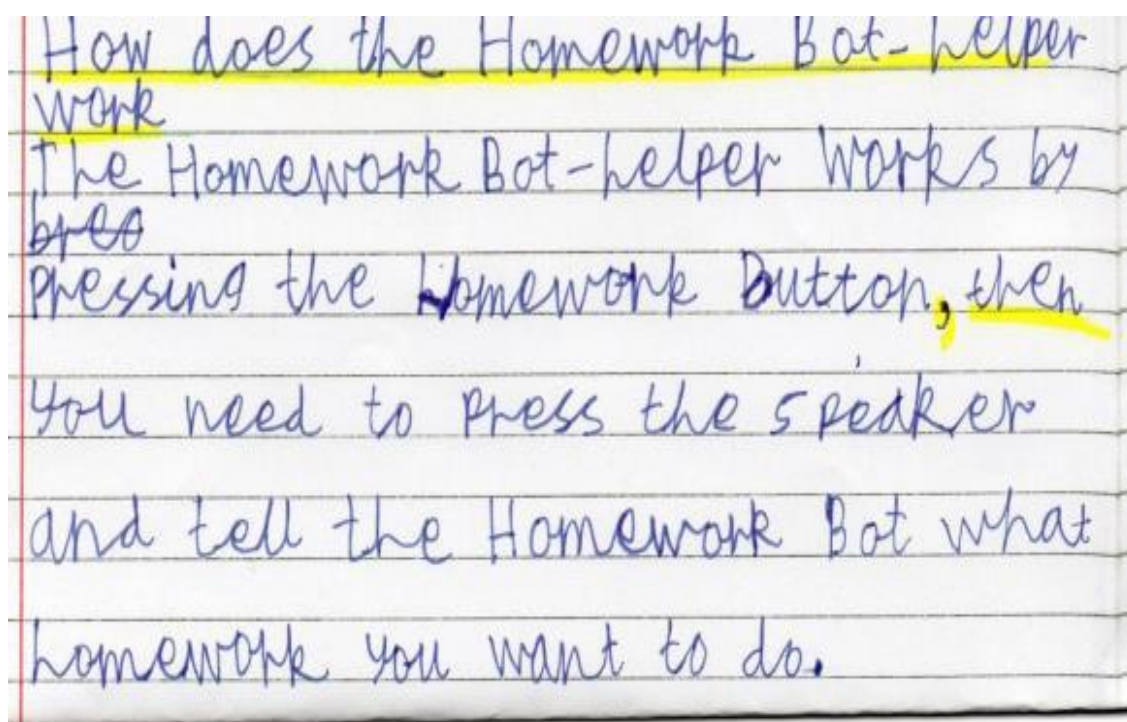
The teacher expanded upon her attempts to make the criteria clearer for the learners at different points during the interview. However, I will focus on those parts of her account that can help to provide understanding about the extent to which she thought her pupils actually understood her expectations of what would be a good piece of writing.

Accordingly, when asked about how self-assessment took place within this strategy, the teacher noted that the criteria checklist was marked by the students, first, and then this process was monitored by her. This was done by completing the table within the corresponding column or asking the students an additional question *'can you tell me, can you come up to me and tell me where you have used it?'* (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:5-6). This was in order for them to demonstrate how the criteria were reflected in their actual piece of writing.

*...Because sometimes of course they'll tick it and they'll think they've got it. And then I'll say no you haven't got it. Or sometimes they'll leave it because they're not too sure. And if they thought they didn't have it, but they have, I would say you have actually used this. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:5-6)*

To visualise what the Marking Ladder (success criteria table) looked like, an illustrative example is presented below, with the excerpt being taken from one student's book. The learning objective that guided this particular writing task was: *'I can write an explanation text about my invention'*.





Explanation Text Marking Ladder

Pupil	Objective	Teacher
✓	My title 'How...' or 'Why...' indicates what I am writing about	✓
✓	My opening statement introduces the topic and addresses the reader	✓
✓	I have used headings and paragraphs for each explanation	✓
X	I have extended my sentences	
X	I have included a labelled diagram	
X	I have used the present tense	✓
X	I have used time and causal connectives	
✓	My concluding summary or statement further explains the invention	

**WWW (What went well):**

*Your initial use of headings helps to organise your writing into relevant blocks of info.*

**EBI (Even better if)**

*You thoroughly explained how it worked by extending your sentences and using connectives.*

Figure 7.2 Example of a writing task and the feedback provided. Y4- student. Lily – Class Teacher.

The example above shows how the student and the teacher checked the piece of work against the list and it can be seen that the latter has left some spaces blank. The student has indicated that those criteria have not been demonstrated with an X, but the teacher has not done so, which was also the case in other data I collected. Figure 7.2 also shows comments added by the teacher, with the WWW referring to the use of headings and the EBI being about the use of extended sentences and

connectives.

The teacher's own account and the excerpt from the student's book seemed to illustrate the same idea in terms of students' engagement with the success criteria. This strategy (Marking Ladder) was intended to help the pupils to know which features were present or absent within a particular piece of writing, but beyond that, what remained at stake or less clear, at the time of this interview, was its contribution to the understanding of quality. Thus, when Lily approached the marking of her students written tasks, there was no sense of a negotiation of quality, as was found during classroom interactions. What counted as good work was pre-established and explicitly incorporated within a list, against which the writing should be assessed. The pupils' participation within this process was minimal and it was the teacher who exerted the foremost role. This notion became still more evident when Lily reported that, at the time of this interview, some peer-assessment strategies, such as the students' comments on their peers' writing, had been removed and replaced by the success criteria table:

*I think because we prefer, we thought that, compared to the ladder, the learning ladder of the success criteria, this was easy. The success criteria here, the smaller one, is easier to do because it's already clearly seen when we're ticking it what they have got. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:10)*

Various factors led to the preference for the success criteria list over peer marking, one of which concerned practical issues '... We decided as a school not to use it, because sometimes it can be quite time-consuming as well, to wait for the children to look at each other's work.' (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:10). However, Lily's foremost reason pertained to her view regarding her students' capacity to understand concepts of quality and to voice their understanding concerning these concepts to other students, especially in regard to the written form:

*... I think it was because sometimes the peer assessment, the comments given weren't ... you know, weren't moving the children on in their learning. It would be comments that weren't really valuable for the other children and things like that. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:5-6)*

Thus, she seemed to have developed the perception that the students were not skilled enough to judge the others' work and this occurred to a greater extent when the child was a low achiever:

*...especially for some children who might not have good reading skills, it would be really difficult for them to try to even read another child's work... So, although they can easily say something they do like and something they don't like, it's coming up with something to say like you could do this and so that is what I think they found most difficult. So, we decided to stop that. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:6)*

All in all, it seems that Lily greatly valued the Marking Ladder in itself as an artefact that worked effectively for her, in the specific context of her marking procedures, but the impact of this strategy on the students' learning, whether positive or negative, was unclear. In sum, regarding the teacher written feedback approach, whether the criteria were perceived more as a set of instructions and less as guidance for improvement remains unresolved.

#### **7.5.4 Summary**

Key elements were identified within Lily's approach to providing feedback to her students' written work. She believed that feedback should not emphasise the corrections of basic errors, such as punctuation and spelling. She was selective in marking just the high frequency words that were misspelt. This notion was also reflected when carrying out highlighting and regarding other components of her marking procedure. For instance, she did not frequently indicate punctuation errors as part of the written comments nor did she include punctuation and spelling as part of the listed criteria to produce a piece of writing.

The feedback through comments tended to be focused on informing the pupils what had been done well and what still needed to be worked out. This was enacted by using the WWW and EBI strategies. For the main pieces of writing, the comments also included questions aimed at extending the students' learning. The teacher described her way of tailoring the questions according her previous judgment about a child's capability, but it was not possible to capture evidence from the data in terms of how this individualised feedback helped the students in developing further

learning.

The teacher's account revealed that she believed that most of the students were not able to recognise what quality meant and thus, be able to communicate its aspects to others. She was also of the opinion that this was particularly hard when it needed to be achieved in writing, in the form of peer assessment, especially for those who were low achievers. Consequently, for Lily, the Marking Ladder of the success criteria was a tool that was easier to implement. However, the data indicated that while she valued this strategy, she also asserted that the students might well have had a mechanistic view of the written criteria. In other words, she was of the view that the pupils found it difficult to unpack their meanings by themselves.

## Chapter 8

### Discussion

#### 8.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' own interpretations regarding feedback in terms of theory and practice. In Chapter 2, the Literature Review (see Section 2.3), I drew on the work by Sadler (1989, 2007) and Black & Wiliam (1998) to identify feedback as a key component of assessment, which is intended to lead to formative action. This requires not only the teacher's role in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their students' work and to provide pieces of advice for improvement, for it also involves students' own understanding of what quality means, which is hence not a minor aspect of learning. Accordingly, I investigated a range of assessment practices carried out by the participant teachers, which were presumed by them to help the students to explore quality throughout their engagement with different tasks.

In the previous four chapters, I have analysed selected data, corresponding to the four teachers that took part of this study: Sophie, St. Andrew's Primary School (Chapter 4); Steve, St Albert's Primary School (Chapter 5); Carolyn, St. Thomas's Primary School (Chapter 6) and Lily also from St. Thomas's Primary School (Chapter 7). However, the claims made in the current chapter are not about the teachers themselves, but rather, about the ways formative assessment may be enacted.

As stated earlier (see Chapter 1: General overview and Chapter 3: Methodology), the applied analytical approach was not only aimed at revealing teachers' practices - *what they do*, but also about documenting their stated points of view, in order to capture the underlying principles that guide them - *what they believe*. This study focused on feedback that the teachers give to learners in the actual conduct of classroom interaction and through pupil written assignments. This allowed for capturing the details and nuances of meanings attributed to different feedback instances amongst the four participant teachers and also within their own repertoire of practices. From this emerged a range of conceptualisations that explained their particular approaches

to formative assessment. Accordingly, the chapter is organised around the following topics: Feedback enacted within classroom interaction and written tasks; diversity of interpretations (section 8.2); and learning conceptions underlying formative assessment practices (section 8.3).

## **8.2 Feedback enacted within classroom interaction and written tasks; diversity of interpretations**

Feedback practices were played out in a variety of ways, which were shaped by different views or reference points held by the participant teachers. The literature review (see Chapter 2) brought to the fore that feedback is one of the central areas in helping students' learning. This, in the words of Sadler (1989), would imply allowing pupils to close the gap between their current understanding and the learning goal. However, throughout the literature the assumption also arose that this is not a straight and smooth path, that is, just giving feedback it is not synonymous with seeing pupils promptly taking the next step and improving their work. How the teachers' messages are conveyed and the extent to which pupils are able to grasp a sense of quality by themselves constitute crucial elements in formative feedback. However, these can be crossed by complexities in the actual teacher-student interaction that may limit the possibilities for feedback to thrive (Sadler, 1989; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Brookhart, 2008).

### **8.2.1 Teacher view of the next steps**

The understanding of the next steps in the learning and how to get there are essential elements within a formative assessment approach. The classroom observation and the interview data show that next step was a notion readily referred to by the participant teachers of my study. But data also provided evidence of how flexible the understanding and enactment of this can be. Consequently, in this section the focus of the discussion is on how these teachers appeared to conceptualise next steps, what they were trying to get their students to do in response to their feedback and to what extent this was associated with the key notion of taking the learning forward.

- Next steps as testing

Carolyn was mainly concerned with ascertaining what had been achieved and what not in order to identify what still needed to be done to complete all the task requirements. The analysis of sequences from classroom interaction in Chapter 6 shows that part of this teacher's feedback appeared to be designed to find out whether the students were clear about all the requirements of a piece of work, which were pre-established through school policy and communicated to pupils in a variety of forms. These requirements were spelled out separately, as shown in episode 9 (subsection 6.4.1), or they took the form of criteria sheets used as one of the tools to assess pieces of writing (see figure 6.2).

This intentionality to cover most, if not all, of the elements to accomplish the task, suggests that formative assessment was being interpreted as a process of collecting evidence from learners mainly to determine what should be worked on to meet the learning objective. In Carolyn's observed lessons, feedback information through spoken interaction and written comments appears to have been associated with the idea of frequent testing and reminiscent of performativity. Episode 10 (subsection 6.4.2) is illustrative of how the teacher's messages were mixed. In this extract, Carolyn strikingly encouraged the class to provide feedback to a group of peers when they acted out a poem, whilst at the same time her prompts seemed to convey the idea of discussing quality of work by comparing performance. Specifically, the teacher was using a strategy aimed at yielding qualitative comments from the students about each other's work, which dominated the first part of the interaction. However, the sequence did not continue in the same vein, as the line of inquiry shifted towards what features were still missing. From then on, the teacher's intervention involved her providing some clues regarding what was lacking, which led to a guessing game; shaping the interaction within a type of talk identified as recitation (Alexander, 2004) (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.4.1). Hence, this particular episode exemplifies ambiguous priorities, regarding the nature of feedback, i.e. whether it is for improvement or ensuring correctness. These competing motives also emerged across the other two sequences presented in Chapter 6 (Episodes 9 and 11) and owing to their prevalence it would appear that, within Carolyn's observed lessons, next steps were more aimed at correction to address what was missing through testing and less towards

improvement.

The interplay between providing feedback and aiding pupil performance is also evident from the data analysis on the written forms of feedback. Carolyn's account regarding her intended purposes when making written comments aimed at providing the next steps to learners, revealed that she saw this as a process of making detailed judgments pertinent to every child. So, for her, it was important to highlight, as much as possible, strengths and weaknesses within their pieces of work ... *'so they have all got slightly different things that they are not doing right, so it is just to keep on top of it all'...* (Carolyn, *St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:6*). This statement and my data analysis in Chapter 6 (see section 6.5.2) support the claim above from observing the episodes. That is, this practice of spelling out everything about the quality of a piece of work, on some occasions, led the teacher to emphasise more what was missing and thus, seems to leave little space for providing pieces of advice for improvement.

It could be the case that drawing attention to every element that had not been demonstrated within the piece of work sought to correct what inhibits meeting the learning objective. In so doing, formative action becomes entangled with the notion of testing. From this perspective, Carolyn's approach resembles convergent assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001), which, as these authors explain, focuses less on formative purposes and more on continuous summative assessment. I believe that this perspective underpinned this teacher's practice and this was discernable in her own reflections with regard to how she thought assessment for learning went on during her lessons (see subsection 6.4.3). My analysis shows that she talked about frequent assessment of the students' work and providing them with opportunities to *'prove that they have learnt'...* (Carolyn, *St Thomas's Primary School. Int-3:11*).

- Next steps as remediation

A similar perspective was encountered within Sophie's assessment practices (see Chapter 4). Broadly, her approach also echoed the notion of convergent assessment, although with subtle and nuanced differences that need to be taken into account in order to grasp her intentions when providing feedback. The analysis of selected transcripts from classroom interaction (see subsection 4.4.1), suggests that Sophie was struggling when it came to helping her students perform in the ways she wanted. In



her attempt to generate quality work, sometimes she stressed corrections, whilst on other occasions she drew attention to improvements or she would address both simultaneously. Episode 1 (subsection 4.4.1), where the discussion revolved around the settlement of one criterion (times connectives) for writing a diary extract, illustrated how the possibilities to enhance understanding were restricted. The extract also revealed the competing aims of whether the teacher's intention was taking up some students' responses or to ensure the task continued on target. This unresolved tension is also found within other interactions, in spite of the teacher's focus on more sophisticated aspects of quality of work, such as how to capture the reader's interest, as shown in episode 2 (subsection 4.4.1) and when she asked the students to give an opinion as to whether a piece of writing made sense (episode 3; same subsection). In both extracts, the teacher invited the class to build a model or to critique one example already devised by her, but this purpose seemed to be constrained by the ways in which the interaction was structured. Instead, what emerges from the data is because the teacher knew where the students should be in their learning and was trying to help them to get there, each time they put forward suggestions that she considered not to be appropriate, she would take charge of the interaction again. Then, she would scaffold those aspects that she considered were hindering the learning. In the analysis, I have contended that this could reflect a view of feedback as spotlighting those elements that pupils cannot do, rather than what they actually can. In other words, when the teacher wanted to help her students close the gap, by emphasising what had not yet been achieved, she was enacting next steps as remediation (Perrenoud, 1998). This could explain why in some of the observed teacher-students exchanges the balance was tilted towards correctness and completing the task rather than interpreting it.

Generally, my analysis in Chapter 4, gave me the impression that within Sophie's observed interactions there was less a sense of performativity, which thus contrasted with Carolyn's approach. However, what I have learnt from the data is that seeing next steps as testing and perceiving it as remediation results in commonalities regarding the feedback practices. The most notable was a focus on what aspects should be rectified to complete the task being carried out, and this seemed to occur in spite of the different underpinning motives that these two teachers expressed. For instance,

despite Sophie not using fixed criteria sheets to make judgments on students' performance, the weight of the interactions often remained in her hands and she was highly concerned about what her students knew or did not know about pre-established elements for undertaking the task as stated in the curriculum, hence evoking the aforementioned convergent approach to assessment (Torrance & Pryor 1998).

- Next steps as moving forward

A different version of feedback intervention came across for Steve's assessment practices. The analysis of extracts from spoken interaction (see Chapter 5) provided evidence that while the need for accomplishing task demands and lesson targets were motives behind the teacher-student exchanges, more opportunities were offered that pointed towards pupils' learning trajectory. This is a particular dimension that distinguishes Steve's approach from those of the previous two teachers (Sophie - St. Andrew's Primary School and Carolyn - St. Thomas's Primary School), where feedback seems to occur more along the teachers' paths.

Despite Steve's way of dealing with feedback interactions not necessarily relying upon student centred discussion in the form of extended lines of inquiry, his pupils' unsolicited contributions were not uncommon within the exchanges and he welcomed them as a means of moving things forward. See, for instance, episode 6 and the transcript that follows it (subsection 5.4.1), where the teacher modelled some examples for devising a balanced argument and the pupils made their own suggestions. The analysis of this extract illustrates that the ideas proposed by some students involved small acts of intervention, such as adding vocabulary to more sophisticated moves aimed at proposing an alternative structure to organising the piece of writing, which hence differed from the model presented by the teacher. This means that while Steve did not explore further pupils' additional ideas in the sense of asking other students' opinion on them, there was still evidence of the teacher acknowledging these unbidden acts. This was done in two ways: by encouraging pupils to have a go and to experience for themselves what would happen when approaching the task differently (see segment that follows episode 6, same subsection) or by incorporating pupils' ideas into the model under discussion (episode 7, subsection 5.4.1).

Steve's reflections on his lessons brought to the fore relevant insights about the interrelatedness between assessment and learning in his practices (see subsection 5.4.3). This issue is examined in detail in section 8.3. So far, for the purpose of this subsection, it is important to highlight that feedback appears to have been focused on what students could do to enhance their work. According to the selected episodes, next steps seem to have been aligned with those elements that can add quality and thus, there was a sense of moving forward in this approach. In addition, with this perspective what counts as good work does not depend entirely on the teacher's judgments, for what students say does matter and it is considered as part of the model that is being produced. Thus, in this teacher's approach some of the elements of divergent assessment proposed by Torrance and Pryor (1998) are found. While this teacher had his own agenda and his practice appears to have been curriculum based, he would allow students engagement as initiators. Steve's examples relating to defining quality were not entirely uncontested, thus what had been planned was not completely inflexible. This resonates with what Torrance and Pryor call the 'practical implications' of a divergent approach to assessment (1998:153).

By and large, these examples of interactions involving formative assessment are pervaded by the idea that, whilst all the participants talked about next steps when describing their practices, not all of them conceptualised it as providing guidance for improvement. Two of the teachers saw next steps as requiring emphasis being placed on what needed to be rectified or corrected, but their actions seemed to be driven by different motives.

### **8.2.2 Notions of quality within feedback practices**

So far, different views of formative assessment have been explored, with reference to one of the key points within this concept, as suggested in the literature – *providing next steps to the learners*. Regarding which, I have referred back to pieces of data in order to signal what I have found idiosyncratic that would appear have shaped the underlying intentions within the interactions of each participant teacher. The previous identified viewpoints can serve as starting point from which to build on in the ensuing discussion, as the issues that are addressed below become complementary to it as well

as being interdependent. In this subsection, attention is paid to what the data reveal concerning the possibilities for students to explore the quality of work, which constitutes one of the essential features for feedback to occur aimed at enabling pupils to monitor those elements of quality while the tasks are going on (Sadler, 1989) (see Chapter 2, Literature Review; subsection 2.3.1).

The results chapters shed light on how the participant teachers engineered tasks and strategies, which involved communicating what counts as good work to their pupils. What emerged from my data analysis is that with some of the encountered feedback initiatives the teachers alone determined the quality of the work, whereas others gave more space for the students to exert, eventually, the role of being more active in the learning and assessment process. In this subsection, I discuss further the evidence pertaining to the particular teachers' approaches to defining quality and their views about what they believed their pupils were capable of in terms of recognising it. I reflect upon what was observed as being promoted as a result of feedback; whether it was correcting, acting or reflecting. I address these issues, first, with regards to spoken interaction, and then I refer to written forms of feedback. This is due to the data suggesting that insightful distinctions should be made both across and within each of the teachers' own approaches.

#### **8.2.2.1 Exploring quality in spoken interaction**

Most of the selected episodes illustrate that, in a broad sense, the lessons investigated shared some processes in common involving feedback, including: communicating to the students the assessment criteria before the engagement with the task; in some cases, clarifying them during the process of the production itself; and revising the work that had been done with aspects of quality being judged. Questioning was the basis of the different teachers' efforts in terms of monitoring the learning process during lessons and rich data were gathered in this respect. Specifically, I have found relevant evidence concerning how they interpreted the students' responses and how the pupils appeared to understand the teachers' questions. In this subsection, the discussion revolves around those signs within the exchanges that led to a range of possibilities for the teachers when expressing quality. This means bringing up those elements that

fostered the negotiation of quality during interactions and those that appeared to hinder it.

- *Predetermining quality of work.*

In the previous subsection, I drew on Carolyn's observed practice to make the point that next steps can be interpreted as being closely associated with the idea of testing, whereby, in her case, the purpose of feedback about enhancing quality appeared to be overshadowed by the aim of leading the students towards completing the task. The discussion highlighted how the teacher adopted the practice of spelling out what counted as good work. I return to this point here and now consider what effect this teacher's view on feedback seemed to have on her students.

From this teacher's account of her lessons (subsection 6.4.3), her preference for the use of the criteria check list over peer assessment activities became evident and this was accentuated when she referred to written forms of feedback (see subsection 6.5.3). The decision to express quality in this way resonates with the analytic approach of making judgments about what counts as good work (Sadler, 1989). This approach, as Sadler argues, emphasises appointed features being communicated to the students as part of the task specifications and then these are recapitulated on forms, once the pieces of writing have been assessed, rather than encouraging the learners to assess their work using multiple criteria (see Chapter 2; subsection 2.3.1). I think that what Carolyn was observed doing in the classroom was informed by an analytic approach. See, for example, figure 6.2 (subsection 6.5.3), where the students used the success criteria table to determine whether the specified features were absent or present within the piece of writing. However, when describing this strategy during interview, the teacher expressed the view that the pupils did not have sufficient understanding of the meaning of the criteria.

This focus on separated features against which to make judgments on the quality of a piece of work is a perspective that seemed to permeate a great deal of the teacher-student interactions. This is shown in the episodes presented in Chapter 6 (subsections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2, respectively). Within episode 9, for instance, the teacher tried to model the writing of a character description by asking the students to identify some

elements, one at a time, within the template given (metaphors, effective verbs, sentence openers, etc). In episode 10, the class, guided by the teacher, had drawn up a list of success criteria for performing a poem (vary your speech, include a rhythm and a beat, vary the speed, etc), which was followed by different groups acting out the poem and the class provided feedback to them, directed by the teacher. Moreover, in episode 11, the exchanges drew on a previous strategy, where the students swapped books with their partners to write comments on their work. Different pupils were then asked to read these comments aloud from their peer's books and the class added more judgments guided by the teacher. These data further illustrate a commonality with regards how quality was established and represented an example of how the possibilities for students to explore more complex aspects of the writing could be restricted. Hence, the focus, rather than being about making complex judgments on the piece of writing, as a whole (Sadler, 1989), was about corroborating what was there and what was not. I present below a segment which I have taken from episode 11 (subsection 6.4.2) to portray this point.

11. T: ... Good, so you have got a bit of repetition there as well. So, what was good? What example did you hear? ...S13, have you got an example this time?
12. S13: Yes, she used alliteration – whistling wind, and she used personification when she said he awoke nature.
13. T: Fantastic.
14. S13: And she used –ly words and –ing words.
15. T: And where did she use them?
16. S13: Glistening at the start of the sentence.
17. T: Good, the start of the sentence to really vary the sentence. Excellent and I am hoping she used commas correctly. Obviously when I mark it, I'll have a look, but it sounds fantastic.

It is clear from the data that there is an issue within Carolyn's approach, in terms of failing to make accessible the notion of quality of work to her students and if she had, this would have enabled them to engage more actively within this process. From the analysis of this teacher's interviews, it emerged that she held the view that her

students were not skilled enough to work with the success criteria. In particular, she expressed the belief that most of her pupils were not able to discuss about these with their peers or when performing peer-marking (see subsection 6.4.3). In other words, the data reveal that she did not actually believe that most of her students could develop a sense of quality, with the exception of those who she considered as having high ability. In the analysis, I pointed out that the stance taken by this teacher bears some resemblance with 'entity theories of learning' (Dweck, 2000); how learning and assessment can interact is revisited in section 8.3.

I would also locate Sophie's feedback practices within an analytic approach when she tried to convey concepts of quality to her students. However, unlike Carolyn, this teacher seemed to deal with conflicting motives in trying to address simple as well as complex aspects of quality writing. There is a wide consensus in the literature of the inflexibility of the analytical approach in terms of how it can undermine the likelihood of students understanding quality as well as learning how to make judgments on their own work and hence, hinder their becoming independent learners (Sadler, 1989; Black & Wiliam, 2006, 2012; Black *et al.*, 2003; Torrance and Pryor, 1998; Marshall, 2004; Marshall & Drummond, 2006). Interestingly, this teacher's reflections on her lessons also points to a similar orientation that pupils should have a more active role in learning and assessment. See, for example, what she said when explaining the underpinning intention regarding her modelling activities (taken from data analysis Chapter 4; subsection 4.4.3):

*'I think the teacher needs to be aware that you can't give them everything; something has to come from them. They have to have some ownership of the lesson as well. So, that's why we sometimes put up our modelling examples and then say, "What do you think of that? ...What could you do to make this better?" So, then they are constantly thinking about, okay I will reread my work, but I bet there is something I can do that will make it better, so constantly reflecting on their work'. (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int- 3:8)*

However, the evidence from the episodes when modelling was taking place suggests that the intended purpose of getting the students to reflect on their work did not come through readily. For instance, in episodes 2 and 3 (subsection 4.4.1), what emerges from the analysis of these exchanges is that they appear to be oriented more

towards instructions and less towards modelling. For, despite different pupils being asked to make contributions, for those that did, Sophie used evaluative movements and often swiftly closed the sequences. In the analysis, I have contended that the ways in which Sophie structured the sequences and how she posed questions in the classroom appeared to inhibit her purpose in getting pupils to understand quality. In a broad sense and looking at the evidence in the context of Alexander's (2004) repertoire of talk, recitation and instruction seemed to be the prevalent forms of discourse used by this participant teacher (see Chapter 2; subsection 2.4.1). Consequently, further exploration of alternative ideas did not thrive.

During interview, she mentioned she had difficulty getting the pupils to reflect on their work and suggested that this was probably due to her having to engineer modelling for students with different levels of abilities (see subsection 4.4.3). She argued that setting up differentiated examples or prompts for her class could be helpful in terms of understanding. However, she then said that, in spite of her efforts, there had been little progress in terms of the students coming to grasp or internalise some of the tools that were meant to be used as feedback. In particular, she commented how the pupils engaged with learning objectives and success criteria at a mechanistic level, which she attributed to the early stage of the development of the feedback policy within the school (see subsection 4.5.3).

In spite of the teacher's own considerations, she stressed that basic and complex aspects of quality writing should be taught, including understanding of the subject matter. However, ostensibly, this did not mean that she considered all her children as being capable of achieving it, which echoes elements of the entity theory of learning (Dweck, 2000) (see literature review; subsection 2.6.3). This notion can be related to her perspective on next steps as remediation.

I think these were unresolved dilemmas for Sophie, in that when she was reflecting on their own lessons, whilst she was mindful of feedback not being just about correctness, she had yet to work out how to get her students to understand what would bring quality to their work. The data suggest that quality was tied to each task as well as to the teacher's expectations and instructions, which meant that the concept was difficult to transfer to other contexts. As a result, I would contend that this practice is similar to



the analytic approach in relation to describing quality (Sadler, 1989).

- *Some signals of the negotiation of quality*

As opposed to an analytic approach, Sadler (1989) upholds the need for a configurational assessment to make judgments about the quality of work. As he explains, within this perspective, the judgments are complex and they involve consideration of the piece of work in a holistic way. What is important is the interrelatedness among criteria, but not necessarily their detailed specification in advance. He contends that 'Knowledge of the criteria is caught through experience, not defined' (1989:135) and suggests that, students should be gradually incorporated into the guild knowledge of people (a tutor-teacher-peer), who are already sort of connoisseurs. The distinction made by Sadler (1989) informed my understanding and helped me to explore those elements within the interactions that show different paths for teachers expressing quality and how pupils respond to these actions. This is illustrated below when focusing on Steve - St. Albert's Primary School and Lily - St. Thomas's Primary School.

Regarding Steve, it has been already stated in this chapter that he appeared to adopt the view of taking the learners forward in their learning. Classroom episodes discussed earlier show that he took unsolicited ideas from pupils seriously and when these contributions related to an example of a piece of writing, which was being used as a model of quality, Steve would allow modifications and encourage the students to attempt alternatives. In this way, the example was not the unique and definitive version of good work and remained open for further discussion. See below a segment of a transcript from lesson 6 (file:711 0112; 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014) that I have taken from the analysis Chapter 5 (subsection 5.4.1):

8. S: If like, if there's one for *for* and then they're called health, economy and choice and *against*?
9. T: You can, you can do it that way if you want to. I don't mind. You can either do all the *fors* and then all the *againsts* or you can do the *for* and *against*. If you do the for and against in the same paragraph, it is very much easier to put on the *other hand* and *however* and stuff like that, okay? But listen, this is your

writing you choose how you want to do it, okay?

10. S: Okay.

In this segment, a student asked whether he could organise the arguments that stand '*For and against*' the topic '*Chocolate rationing*' in a different way. The teacher at first showed some reservations in terms of whether with that new structure the pupil could use the sort of language for discussion and then told him to have a go, thus conveying the view that the students themselves should make the decision how to proceed with the work.

There are more examples of the interactions presented in Chapter 5 that shed light on how Steve framed and directed what he meant by quality. It could be said that the important point that emerges from the data is that his enactment of this practice went beyond the checking out of 'individual properties or qualities' (Sadler, 1989:136), such as the amount of connectives that are used or not. The class talked about the structure of the writing, as in the segment introduced above. On other occasions, they talked about the sort of arguments to incorporate in the task at hand (episode 7, subsection 5.4.1) and this was occurring as part of an ongoing process. Consequently, the ideas and questions posed by the pupils arose when they were reflecting on their own work. When the teacher acknowledged these propositions, this contributed to shaping the notion that the criteria for quality were not completely fixed, but rather, subject to continuous adjustment. In the analysis, I have noted that this process was facilitated by the ways in which the teacher-student exchanges unfolded. Steve follow up moves did not always imply an evaluation, for as the data showed, on some occasions it occurred after a child's initiation and not subsequent to a pupil response, which meant that the traditional IRF format was being slightly modified (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992) (see episode 7; subsection 5.4.1). Moreover, Steve conducted the interactions by often speaking in the past tense through questions, which thus appeared to be aimed at getting the pupils to revise strategies that were developed in previous lessons, because they were relevant to the task at hand. Bringing the evidence together, I would say that this could be an example of a conversational technique that Mercer (2000) identifies as elicitation (see episodes 6 and 8 in subsections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2, respectively). It has been pointed out previously that the line of inquiry was not

necessarily extended within the interactions, but nevertheless the teacher and students seemed to share a common understanding of the messages conveyed.

In his interview, Steve revealed that the ways in which he orchestrated the learning environment increased pupils' confidence in making inquiries (see subsection 5.4.3). Furthermore, he felt confident about the pupils' capability of interpreting tasks and learning objectives (see subsection 5.5.3). The classroom observation data suggest that all of these intertwined factors enhanced the possibilities of students understanding issues relating to quality writing, in particular, because the teacher gave some room for negotiation.

The analysis of Lily's classroom practice (see subsection 7.4.1) provides some insights into how the concepts of quality were espoused by the teacher and how the pupils seemed to cope with the way in which she translated this in the classroom. A salient issue that deserves attention from the extracts presented in Chapter 7, concerns the way in which the criteria appear to have been developed and articulated so as to judge the work as a whole. For instance, in episode 12 (subsection 7.4.1), Lily shared with her students a schematic structure for writing the opening of a story and highlighted that the purpose of the text was to build up tension. Regarding which, the advice that she gave at the beginning of the sequence was slightly modified and expanded upon through interaction with the children. This occurred, on the one hand, due to the pupils' own inquiries and ideas and on the other, because Lily encouraged them to understand that they could use many alternatives in the form of introducing characters or setting, so long as the writing involved progressively creating suspense. In the analysis, I pointed out that this piece of data is consistent with elements derived from genre theory. Arguably, Lily tried to scaffold children's writing by suggesting to them a sort of frame, which should be conceived as a flexible tool that serves the purpose of the writing (Wray & Lewis, 1997). Now, in interrogating the data further against what Sadler calls configurational assessment, I would say that the pupils were being provided with the experience of learning how to reflect globally on their own work. They were being given the opportunity to understand that they could have a different structure or choose alternative ways to present their characters, and that good work could be produced using any of them, so long as the aspect of increasing suspense was

maintained. Consequently, there was the chance for the pupils to grasp the notion that quality is judged based on the interrelated criteria, regarding which Sadler contends:

‘to appreciate how different varieties within one class or genre... can be of comparable quality even though the basic design and structural features are different’ (Sadler, 1989: 136).

In my analysis, I reflected on how the ways in which Lily seemed to promote the understanding of quality could raise opportunities for the pupils to engage with more complex notions of formative assessment. The analysis also showed that when this sort of exchange was developed, not all the pupils seemed to get the point. That is to say, some children expressed astonishment about hearing of so many options and wanted to be told what structure they should use, rather than choosing one by themselves. I return to this point later in section 8.3, when talking about the intersection between learning and assessment. In this section, it is important to highlight that from this teacher’s perspective there was a sense of allowing children to negotiate quality.

The analysis of the interview data (see subsection 7.4.3) elicited that Lily regarded questioning as a crucial tool for enabling children to explore and expand upon their ideas. She also highlighted that when undertaking modelling the important thing is to consider pupils’ contributions in devising an example. This resonates with classroom observation data that showed students’ ideas were built upon what others had said previously (see episode 13; subsection 7.4.1) or when they were invited by Lily to create an example of a paragraph, which she followed up by encouraging them to talk further about it; focusing on the processes involved in the writing (see episode 14; subsection 7.4.1). Some signs of dialogue were observed within these interactions, whereby the teacher and her students decided collectively how to undertake the learning task (Wolf & Alexander, 2008). There was a sense of pupils reflecting on their work and more opportunities were offered for their thoughts to be connected to reach a better understanding of what they were doing (see episode 12; subsection 7.4.1). So, the dialogue seemed to be supportive and reciprocal (Wolf & Alexander, 2008). Clearly, the ways in which Lily conveyed notions of quality to her students were in alignment with how she appeared to conduct the interaction with them.

Now, bearing in mind the practices and views of both participant teachers, namely, Steve - St. Albert's Primary School and Lily - St. Thomas's Primary School, the data suggest that they were providing spaces for quality negotiation, within spoken interaction with their children. However, a caveat should be made, which is that, if what the literature holds on this matter is taken into account (see Chapter 2; subsections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3), i.e. that understanding of criteria for quality can lay the foundations for self-monitoring (Sadler, 1989) or self- and peer-assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2012), then the process of negotiation observed was still limited. Were these monitoring and assessment processes are in place, this would have facilitated the children articulating aspects of quality and judging their own work as well as that of others, thus progressively becoming more independent learners (Sadler, 1989, 2007, 2010; Black et al., 2003; James et al., 2006; Marshall & Drummond, 2006). In this regard, these research data have provided evidence of distinct elements in Lily and Steve lessons that helped to broaden exploration of quality, but it cannot be claimed that the findings demonstrate transfer of the responsibility for making evaluative judgments from the teacher to the pupils (Sadler, 1989).

Having said this, the quality and extensiveness of my data still allow me to distinguish between two different approaches to defining quality by the participant teachers. Specifically, by using Sadler's distinction, I have identified an analytic perspective with criteria specified in advance, leaving limited space for exploring further understanding (Carolyn – St. Thomas's Primary School; Sophie – St. Andrew's Primary School). Whilst Steve (St. Albert's Primary School) and Lily (St. Thomas's Primary School) seemed to have introduced some elements of configurational assessment, thus providing more room for the negotiation of quality. Key aspects of an analytic method are the use of criteria check lists and *have I statements*, which resonate with convergent assessment. Under the second approach, the expectation is that pupils are provided with an evaluative experience to reflect on their work, with the focus being less concerned with what criteria to meet and more about explaining what they are doing. This means, it is not about getting children to tick boxes within a list of questions of the form: "*have I included paragraphs in my writing?*", but rather, the aim is to encourage the pupils to understand, and to reason about: *How do we know a paragraph is a paragraph?*, which is closer to metacognitive elicitations and, hence more linked to divergent forms

of assessment.

#### **8.2.2.2 Exploring quality as represented in written feedback**

The written feedback from the participant teachers had a range of purposes. The first, was in relation to the basics of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation), which relied on a number of underlining procedures, whereas the second concerned the content that emerged from the teacher's use of written comments and the third, pertained to the challenges for self- and peer-assessment arising from working with the learning objective and success criteria.

According to the data analysis, the set of practices, within these three identified areas, were enacted differently by each of the teachers. This occurred in terms of meanings and actions (see analytical chapters, from 4 to 7). In this subsection, I refer to these findings from a broader perspective, with the aim being to discern the dominant approaches and exploring what would be the implications of these for enabling students to develop a sense of quality. In addition, I discuss the matter of how some of the participant teachers appeared to be guided by different principles regarding their own verbal and written feedback practices. I also explore how tensions between guidance and correction of pupils' work shaped the feedback repertoire in relation to these practices.

- The basics of the writing

Regarding feedback on the basics of the writing, the data show a common orientation towards correcting errors, although with different kinds of emphasis. For instance, Sophie (St. Andrew's Primary School) paid attention to spelling, but only marked misspelt words that were familiar to the students and those directly related to the subject matter (see subsection 4.5.1). This teacher was especially concerned with not discouraging pupils, who were very weak in spelling, by correcting all these errors in their work. This signalled that whilst she had a certain view of what language development is about, she also took care to address the emotions of her students in her teaching. Steve (St. Albert's Primary School) did not appear to use a selecting strategy, he underlined all spelling and punctuation mistakes and clearly perceived his role as that of indicating what needed to be amended, but putting the responsibility

for making the corrections on the pupils themselves (see subsection 5.5.1). By contrast, Carolyn (St. Thomas's Primary School) began by stating that basic errors should not have a prominent place in marking, however, she often spelt out everything, especially if a child had fundamental problems with punctuation (see subsection 6.5.1). Whilst Lily (St. Thomas's Primary School) talked about spotlighting aspects related to grammar, but not emphasising what was wrong and rather, pointing out what was right, seemingly to encourage the pupils to write more, although not necessarily to 'improve' their work (see subsection 7.5.1). Hence, the data illustrate the differing choices made by the teachers to cope with this part of their marking process and their practices are seen to have remained aligned with the strategies and procedures suggested within the policy documents of each school.

Theoretically, the identified tendency towards correcting spelling, grammar and punctuation can be associated with what Marshall (2004) called the *goal model for writing*. She argues that the underlying principle that drives this model is that the skills to produce good pieces of writing can be practised separately. She adds that identifying errors can make the process more quantifiable, such that progression is interpreted retrospectively, thus leading to remedial actions that involve the teacher indicating how to put right what is wrong. However, it is important to mention that the participant teachers did not necessarily endorse the principles of this perspective. As stated earlier, they held to different ways for implementing their ideas and beliefs. For instance, Sophie was interested in pointing out misspelt words linked to the topic and in using this selecting strategy, she expected her children to learn from it. Whilst it appears that Lily was interested in the correct usage of grammar and so she did not foreground spelling mistakes. In sum, the participant teachers applied an underlining procedure driven by different intentions and motives. However, despite these singularities in the teacher work, the goal model seems to remain present throughout this part of their marking, which resulted in there being limited possibilities for the students' exploration of quality.

- Written comments

In terms of the design of written comments and the feedback messages involved, three dimensions emerged from the practices enacted by the four participant teachers: First,

they wanted to communicate to their students whether they had met the learning objective; second, they wished to give positive information by recognising what had been done well; and third, they aimed to provide advice on follow-up action. Analysis of these elements from their perspectives, allows for understanding of what they believed quality involves in a piece of writing. Sophie (St. Andrew's Primary School) focused mainly on the understanding of the topic and varied her prompts to meet the needs of the pupils whom she considered to be low, middle, or high achievers (see subsection 4.5.2). Steve (St. Albert's Primary School) placed emphasis on quality language expressions (see subsection 5.5.2), whilst Carolyn (St. Thomas's Primary School) paid attention to key elements according to the sort of text or genre, as well as aspects of grammar and punctuation, where appropriate (see subsection 6.5.2). Finally, Lily (St. Thomas's Primary School) also stressed the use of words and structures within specific kinds of texts. In addition, she considered that comments should be differentiated by posing questions attuned to the different abilities of the children (see subsection 7.5.2). The data illustrate that whilst the teachers were idiosyncratic, in terms of the choices made, their feedback was tied to the curriculum content.

In the excerpts from the students' books, it becomes clear that quality was delineated within the conventions of a particular genre (Wray & Lewis, 1997). Sophie gave feedback on a report text (see figures 4.1 and 4.2); Steve assessed the writing of a description text (see figures 5.1 and 5.2), as too did Carolyn (see figures 6.1 and 6.2); and Lily marked the writing of an explanation text (see figures 7.1 and 7.2). These examples suggest that pupils' work was judged in terms of particular words (connectives – vocabulary) or phrases that characterised the sort of text intended to be produced. This kind of advice is offered as discrete points of information and not in the form of holistic comments. Consequently, less attention is paid to the overall purpose of a piece of writing. I believe this notion permeated the enactment of this feedback strategy by the four participant teachers, but it was most evident within Carolyn and Lily's practices in that both of these teachers devised comments according to a list of specified criteria (see the examples, figures 6.2 and 7.2, respectively). Hence, quality tended to be restricted within the frame provided for the particular genre (Marshall, 2004). This has implications in the ways teachers approach feedback through written comments which I refer to below.



Firstly, when the teachers made comments, including judgments tied very precisely to separate features of the piece of work that had been pre-established, it would appear that, in some cases, the students were able to follow the teachers' guidance, but remains unclear whether they could understand the reasons underpinning the teachers' advice. This style of drafting comments might undermine the possibilities for pupils to start developing their own abilities to interpret quality in a broad sense. For, they would not have been given the experience to perceive that sometimes: 'Something may apparently meet requirements on all appropriate criteria taken individually yet be unsatisfactory overall' (Sadler, 1989:136). As Sadler explains, the pupil cannot arrive at appreciating or to reacting to the work as a whole when the judgments are centred on the specifics; hence, not being complex or holistic (see Chapter 2, Literature Review, subsection 2.3.1)

Secondly, the practice of focusing the feedback messages on particulars seems to have been inextricably linked with what the teachers asked the students to do in the follow up action. The four participant teachers reported their intentions in terms of communicating to the students what they had done well and what they needed to do next. However, this last part of the message seemed to be overwhelmed by the emphasis on what was still missing from the point of view of the curriculum, rather than telling the students how to make quality based improvements in the current piece of work. Hence, the advice on follow up action given by Sophie: '*add a sentence using the key words provided*'; and/or by Steve: '*add a sentence that uses or contains despite*', suggests that, whilst the students acted on the teacher's advice, the quality of the work had only improved slightly or even been overlooked in favour of a focus on specific corrections. Nevertheless, the data also indicate that the teachers hoped the pupils would do better next time and the suggestions made through comments, might have served the purpose of getting them to remember what elements to include. However, it remains uncertain as to whether the comments contributed to broadening the conceptual understanding that could form a basis (principles) for applying to future tasks.

Arguably, the nature of the written comments devised by the participant teachers reveals a strain in terms of to what extent they promote formative action. This refers back to the literature review (see Chapter 2), where it was argued that the key point

that distinguishes formative feedback from other kinds of assessment purposes is to help learners know how to improve (Sadler, 1989; Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006, 2009, 2012; Black, *et al*, 2003; Mansell et al 2009). In the examples that I came across in these primary classrooms, the formative guidance seems to have been entangled within other pedagogic intentions.

- Can students recognise quality in a piece of writing?

Most of the work within the marking process was done with reference to the learning objectives and the success criteria, but the pupils' engagement with these seems to have been problematic at the time that this research was carried out. Some of the interviewed teachers talked about the difficulties for students understanding the meaning of the criteria. For Sophie (St. Andrew's Primary School), this work was at an early stage of development within the school and was being carried out as a routine, without ensuring that the students' had grasped what counted as good work (see subsection 4.5.3). Carolyn and Lily (St. Thomas's Primary School) seem to have shared a similar perspective in that they both claimed that most children were not skilled enough to understand descriptions of quality. Perhaps more importantly, they expressed disbelief in terms of their pupils' ability to articulate notions of quality and to communicate this to others, particularly regarding low achievers when they were engaged in peer marking (see subsections 6.5.3 and 7.5.3). By contrast, Steve argued that his students should play an active role in interpreting not only the criteria, but also his comments, which were presented on stickers alongside the learning intention for the task. As all the students were given the same set of pre-formulated comments, these might not have been appropriate for some individuals' pieces of work. In which case, he would suggest to his students to have a look at their individual writing targets. In the process of the analysis, I noted that this system would require a very demanding effort from pupils to work flexibly with the learning goal and success criteria. But, I did not find further evidence from the data about how this method was unfolded or whether it thrived (see subsection 5.5.3). However, this approach resonates with a theme across Steve's observed lessons and in his underlining procedures. That is to say, Steve wanted his students to realise by themselves, what was happening, when problems arose in a specific task and to identify the mechanisms to enhance their work. He believed in his pupils' capability of understanding and hence, being able to

follow through.

In sum, it seems that the teachers had very diverse theories of the pupils' abilities and how much they could do in response to their feedback. It could be said that, unlike Steve, some participants perceived that there were some types of students, at particular points, that were not able to undertake peer marking. This issue may be related with the teachers' philosophy in education from a widespread perspective, but it was an underlying belief that came up when they reflected on the enactment of their marking procedures. This point will be revisited later on in this chapter (section 8.3), when discussing the interplay between learning and assessment.

In terms of formative purposes, the data suggest that, whilst the written forms of feedback were highly structured around making learning objectives and success criteria evident, there was a sense that these practices were not helpful enough in shaping pupils' learning. Notwithstanding this, this procedure endured and pervaded throughout the work of the four participant teachers, including Steve (St. Albert's Primary School) and Lily (St. Thomas's Primary School), whose spoken feedback was open and flexible when interacting with their pupils inside the classroom.

### **8.2.2.3 Different orientations when providing verbal and written feedback**

What can be learnt from the two previous subsections (8.2.2. 1, and 8.2.2. 2) is that, in this study, the teachers seem to have interpreted the evidence from the learners differently when providing feedback within classroom interaction as opposed to when marking their books. I find this issue significant because it raises the question of how marking was conceptualised.

- Marking as correcting

The focus on the basics of the writing, the choices made when devising comments and the use of success criteria and learning objectives that have not been potentially understood by learners were salient features of the process of marking, regardless of the particular strategies employed by each participant teacher. The main idea that emerged from the previous discussion is that, most likely, the teachers conceived marking as a process of pointing out corrections to help the students get their writing to meet their targets. It could have been the case that marking was not perceived as a

form of feedback or at least was seen as a different form of feedback than that which the teachers carried out through face-to-face dialogue. To illustrate this point, I refer back to Steve (St Albert's Primary School) and Lily (St Thomas's Primary School).

Steve, in his lessons focused on collecting evidence about how pupils articulated and structured pieces of writing for different purposes. He provided opportunities for the students to think and to elaborate their own arguments, thereby extending the possibilities for the exploration of quality (see subsections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2). Nevertheless, his written comments were focused on the specifics, such as the use of determined connectives (see figures 5.1 and 5.2) and providing an overt indication such as '*make your corrections in red pen*'. So, in the actual conduct of the classroom he was closer to a configurational assessment in relation to defining quality, whereas in the students' books, the feedback was oriented towards an analytical approach as he highlighted separated and pre-established features. Hence, the observation and written data reveal dissonance in terms of this teacher's interpretation of how feedback should operate.

In a similar way, Lily, during face to face classroom support, encouraged pupils to reflect on their work and provided them with the opportunity to appreciate quality in more sophisticated ways. This means that the pupils had the possibility of understanding that whatever the variations or choices made to develop the piece of writing they were all aspects of quality that could contribute to its overall purpose (see as an example episode 12; subsection 7.4.1). Moreover, when reflecting on her lessons, Lily highlighted the relevance of developing questioning in order to expand the students' thinking (see subsection 7.4.3). However, this perspective does not resonate with what she said her pupils could do with reference to written work, as she employed tools such as a criteria check list and reported the abandonment of strategies of peer assessment or the limitation of its use to only smaller pieces of writing (see subsection 7.5.3). So, again, like Steve, her approach to defining quality turned into being analytical when she came to mark the students' books.

Altogether, the evidence suggests that these two teachers might have considered that

more purposeful feedback could be provided through spoken interaction. Since, when they marked written work their advice seemed to serve other intentions, as it was more linked to judgment and performance than quality improvement.

- Marking and the audiences of interpretation

An array of motives could have triggered these distinctive emphases between the verbal and written forms of feedback. The first thing to note is that the teachers' reflections on their lessons were characterised by a sense of professional experience in that they talked in depth about some dilemmas faced when providing feedback. Whereas when reporting on their marking process of the written tasks, some of the teachers described the specific ways of accommodating strategies to record evidence of quality, whose devise and formulation did not seem entirely dependent on them. Indeed, a number of elements seemed to be introduced from each of the school policy documents (see subsections 4.2; 5.2 and 6.2), which, in turn, had been influenced by external entities, for as Steve indicated:

*'...I don't know whether that's I think more for external people coming in to make sure that you are marking properly, like OFSTED inspectors...' (Steve, St Albert's Primary School. Int- 1:4)*

Consequently, marking was not just about ascertaining how the students were dealing with the task, for it is also pertained to providing written records of how the teachers were enacting feedback. Marked books were available for scrutiny by external stakeholders as well as by other colleagues or school leaders. This raises the issue that teachers could have become the object of attention within this process, which would affect them in various ways, as was narrated during some of the teachers' interviews, such as when Sophie said:

*...what we are doing is we have a regular book scrutiny, so the leadership team, will take in a sample of your books and look at your marking. They look at how you are marking. They look at the success criteria you are using. They are looking at are children self-assessing... And they will see the evidence of that through the marking that's in the books (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int- 3:3)*

Bearing this in mind, perhaps the teachers had built up an idea of what others expected them to do when implementing formative assessment and thus, felt the

need to show that they had marked according to the set schema. This would then explain, amongst other intertwined motives, why their feedback comments kept to procedures, such as WWW and EBI for peer-marking and the techniques for underlining their children's pieces of writing, for these were recommended in the policy. However, the original intentions behind the implemented strategies seem not to have played out, as discussed earlier (see subsection 8.2.2. 2).

- Convergent framing for written feedback

It should be noted that when analysing marking procedures, we are talking about evidence produced in writing, which is in itself a complex process that involves a person's ability to show what they think or understand about the topic or theme being addressed. Unlike what pupils can demonstrate during classroom interaction, writing is an additional and different process, which is not just a challenge for them as the authors of the pieces of work, for it is also difficult for the teachers to making judgments about their quality using this format. It could be said that part of the message can be lost when transferred from oral to written language.

During on the fly assessment (Heritage, 2007) that takes place during spoken interaction, the participant teachers, especially Steve (St. Albert's Primary School) and Lily (St. Thomas's Primary School), provided more responsive feedback by encouraging pupils' contributions through the task at hand. It has been argued elsewhere how such teacher-student exchanges contain elements of divergent assessment. That is, there was greater pupil involvement as initiators, what the teachers suggested was not completely uncontested and some teachers' questions prompted meta-comments (Torrance and Prior, 1998, 2001). Nevertheless, when the pieces of advice needed to be given in a written format, the participant teachers had to decide how to externalise their judgments, what to communicate to their students and how. To accomplish this, the use of pre-specified criteria and tightly structured comments were strategies clearly accentuated (see previous section 8.2.2.2) and this contrasted with their verbal interaction, especially for Steve and Lily. Hence, the framing turned into being convergent and the possibilities for the further exploration of quality were narrowed. This could have been because as they chose to focus their comments on the basics of

writing (spelling and grammar) and maybe these aspects were seen as non-negotiable in the teachers' minds.

In subsection 8.2.2.2, the problematic nature of the comments was noted regarding the extent to which they served the purpose of helping in the enhancement of the piece of work being assessed. It was also noticed how some teachers did not believe in their students' ability to carry out peer marking. Both issues are supported by the data already analysed (subsections 6.5.3 and 7.5.3) and together they have resonance with convergent assessment. Under this lens, feedback for written work is provided in accordance with what is stated in the curriculum. Consequently, the teacher mainly exerts the role of assessor (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008), with the focus being on establishing what features are present or absent within the piece of writing and advising pupils when they are not getting right the criteria. As a result, the formative purpose of those practices becomes weakened. This has more in common with summative continuous assessment as it involves requesting the students to recall what they need to do and/or to include next time.

### **8.3 Learning conceptions underlying formative assessment practices**

Up to this point, I have pondered on the different views expressed by the participant teachers with respect to their actions and interactions related to feedback. Subsection 8.2.1 drew attention to the diverse interpretations attributed to key notions, such as providing next steps to learners. Theoretically, next steps involve, in essence, formative action (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2006, 2012; ARG, 2002; Mansell et al., 2009), thus implying a forward direction of the learning. However, for some of the teachers this original intention was diverted towards a process of testing and remediation (Carolyn and Sophie's practices, respectively), whereas others, at some points during the classroom interactions, gave more room for the pupils' own learning trajectories to emerge and provided advice more centred on improvements than corrections (Steve, St. Albert's primary School; Lily, St. Thomas's Primary School).

Subsection 8.2.2, portrays the nature of various assessment strategies and discusses the extent to which they reflect the enactment of formative principles. The discussion

revolved around the possibilities of these practices constituting feedback that would help their pupils to build an understanding of what quality of work comprises. In this respect, insightful distinctions were made not only amongst the participants' observed lessons, but also within each teacher's repertoire of practice. It has been noted, for instance, that different underlying assumptions seem to have been involved when feedback was offered in face to face interaction in contrast to when the teachers collected evidence from the learners for their written tasks.

In this section, I want to explore the underlying principles of learning that the teachers appear to have subscribed to and whether or not their views were applied in their approaches to classroom assessment.

- Steve

In the analysis of the observation data from Steve's lessons, it was argued that this teacher seemed to incorporate a cognitive-constructivist dimension into his classroom interaction, as demonstrated in the extract that complements episode 6 (see subsection 5.4.1) and the transcript that follows episode 8 (see subsection 5.4.2). These sequences illustrate that, somehow, when Steve identified an issue where his pupils needed support, he would not give immediate advice on that matter. Instead, his feedback was oriented towards encouraging them to make another attempt, by referring them back to a previous piece of teaching. This might reflect that, he expected the pupils to be able to retrieve previous taught information, which could have been a structure, method or part of the scheme of work and wanted them to use this as a scaffold to make sense of some new aspects of learning. According to James (2006), this resonates with some elements from cognitive-constructivist theories of learning, which demand a more active role from learners, focused on what is happening inside their heads, since these perspectives conceive prior knowledge as a core factor in shaping the students' abilities to learn new material.

It should be noted that the data strongly suggest that Steve and his pupils had developed a mutual understanding that he would not give instant answers to the



difficulties they encountered, but instead, would constantly refer them back to what had been said in previous lessons. It was a relationship or implicit contract that they seem to have developed. These instances were marked by Steve talking in the past tense and the pupils appeared to recognise the signposting to their shared experiences, which consequently became a source of feedback. See as an example of this, segment below (file:711 0112; on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014), which I have taken from the analysis subsection 5.4.2:

25. [T: 00:51:50] Ok S14. So he's crawling somewhere dark, S15? (*the members of the group moved around S15, whispering something*) You guys you're standing in a circle now you should be in a line, facing the front please [...] - Did you not discuss this at your table?
26. S: We did but now we have to change it.
27. T: Hmmm- how does it make you feel S15 the whole story?

In this segment, a group of pupils made an oral presentation to represent the sequence of a storyboard. Something went wrong with that sequence, but there was no further exploration of the difficulty and instead Steve directed the pupils to try again with that bit of their work, regarding which they seem to be clear about what needed to be done to improve it.

In Steve's class, this notion of the teacher and students sharing a common understanding of a classroom event appears to have helped to lay the foundations of increasing the latter's confidence in making uninvited contributions. This requires careful analysis, because it occurred in spite of Steve's subtle evaluative moves and both types of acts were not uncommon within the data. Interestingly, the ideas that emerged from the pupils addressed other aspects of quality in the piece of work under discussion and not just those already highlighted by Steve (see episodes 6 and 7; subsection 5.4.1). The teacher had the tendency of accepting these alternative formulations, thus indicating that he was open to considering quality negotiation. This is a significant point discussed earlier in this chapter (subsection 8.2.2.1). It reflects a teacher's view of assessment with the criteria for quality not being completely fixed and so they can be modified when assessing the work on an ongoing basis. An outlook

that, in turn, can be placed within the socio-cultural paradigm of how students learn (James, 2006). As the analysis of some classroom episodes illustrates (see Chapter 5; subsection 5.4.2), when the pupils posed other possibilities to be incorporated in the writing, they were talking about their particular pieces of work and the fact that the teacher agreed with these different options is indicative of him not acting as the ultimate judge of quality.

The interview findings have pointed to the intertwined underlying learning assumptions for Steve. The first has to do with how he valued speech as a tool that helped the children to articulate and express their thinking. The second, concerns the notion of shared learning and his pedagogical commitment in terms of getting everybody involved in class discussion. He expressed the belief that children working together could benefit those who were having some difficulties, whereby support could be provided through dialogue with more capable children. In the analysis of Steve's account on this matter (see subsection 5.4.3), I have contended that both of these notions bear a link with the Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development (1978). This teacher translated this idea into practice by integrating the children in team work, without separating them into ability groups. He perceived that by doing so, there was a chance that pupils would enrich their learning experience and move forward. That is, he appeared to believe that scaffolding can come from peers until pupils internalise their own ideas, thereby arriving at new understandings.

As noted in the analysis, while Steve did not seem to endorse any kind of theory, or at least not explicitly, these pedagogical principles can be traced back to his practices and his own descriptions. Thus, the data suggest that Steve's interpretations of how students should learn informed his approach to feedback in spoken interaction. Nevertheless, there is also substantial data that indicates that Steve's stance was not the same when it came to written feedback or when he formalised his judgments in the pupils' books. This suggests that whilst his approach to teaching was primarily constructivist, which came across plainly in relation to face to face interactions, when considering his applied strategies towards written work, he appeared to switch to a different perspective. In Chapter 5 (see subsections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2), I analysed the evidence of the strategies employed by Steve in terms of marking and in the previous

section in this chapter, these findings have been further discussed with reference to the possibilities for students' exploration of quality. Broadly, this different approach to feedback appears to be restrictive and limited in contrast with the evidence from classroom interaction. Therefore, it seems reasonable to point out that there is sufficient data to assert that this teacher seemed to hold two or even more perspectives on what assessment entails. One was very formative, constructivist, open, flexible and he did not give immediate answers, preferring to provide feedback messages that could be interpreted as *"go and look at this again"*. However, when it came to written work assessment, this appeared to be defined in terms of summative judgement, criteria bounded and standard based comments that were the same for the whole class.

- Lily

In Lily's lessons, there was also a sense of her encouraging children to talk and to express their ideas. Specifically, she had developed the view that extending pupils thinking through questioning would prove beneficial for learning. It could be said that she guided her pupils in the understanding of quality by providing them with the opportunities to explore a 'horizon of possibilities' (Marshall, 2004). For examples of this type of activity, see episodes 12 and 13 (subsection 7.4.1). In the analysis of this teacher's reflections on her own lessons (see subsection 7.4.3), it emerged that children talking, thinking and learning were blended notions in her account. These stated elements are consistent with what was observed during the interactions, since she was developing a line of inquiry in which the pupils contributed to what their peers were saying (see episode 13) and she seemed to be interested in promoting meta-cognition (see episode 14). This led me to understand that, in spoken interaction, her feedback appeared to be exploratory and provisional (Marshall & Drummond, 2006; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). She tended not to give direct answers and the unpredictable contributions from the floor seem to have affected the children's participation in different ways. The analysis of the episode 12 illustrates this point. I introduce a brief segment of this transcript below (file 711-0099; on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2013):

8. S9: When you're on your build up, can you write like, to introduce someone else, too?

9. T: Absolutely, you don't need to, if you're building, if you've got characters which only occur in the build-up, don't introduce them just yet, because then that adds to the magic. S17?
10. S17: So, in the build-up you can introduce another character?
11. T: Yeah, absolutely. S30? (*S30 and other pupil, hands up, but her/his questions were inaudible*)

The complete episode was examined in Chapter 7 (subsection 7.4.1) and I have summarised its main elements earlier in this chapter (section 8.2.2). What it is important to say about this here is that, at the outset of the sequence the teacher suggested a clear structure to write the opening of a story, which consisted of describing the characters and the setting, first, followed by progressively building suspense. Within the interaction, some pupils argued about different alternatives to achieve this purpose in their writing, all of which were welcomed by the teacher. However, one student (S17) seemed muddled when hearing all these options and it would appear that he was waiting to be told what to write. From this it can be seen that not all children respond to feedback in the same way.

However, this piece of data is also an example of how Lily's feedback practices seem to be designed to get her students to articulate their thoughts and interpretations on their own tasks, which required them to be reflective about their pieces of work. This teacher's intentionality was captured across episodes and as such, her practices appear to have been influenced by sociocultural theories of learning (James, 2006). However, the data is also indicative of this teacher's perspective of learning being different when marking the students' books. From my analysis (see Chapter 7; subsection 7.5.2), it would seem that Lily made specific person oriented assessment, in that she offered advice or guidance based on her previous assessment of the pupils' abilities, i.e. whether an individual had the capacity to make progress in particular ways. Consequently, for those she felt were able to move forward she would tender one kind of advice, whereas for those that she regarded less able to do so, she would give another sort:

*...we adjust them all the time...because we might be focusing on one thing and of course we have got different levels, the children we have got in the*

*classroom, so for example our lower achievers, we won't expect as much as our higher achievers, so our higher achievers we must expect more things, so they might have a longer list of success criteria, so it is all adapted to the children needs as well. (Lily, St Thomas's Primary School. Int-1:5)*

The complexity that arises from Lily's account is that she seems to have adopted different views about what her students were able to do in particular instances. In the previous section in this chapter, it has been discussed how the possibilities for pupils negotiating criteria were limited, in regards to written work, whereby she did not believe her students could perform peer assessment or peer marking. This standpoint contrasts strikingly with the view that emerges from the classroom observation data, when she seemed to be confident about her pupils' engagement with more complex notions of formative assessment.

Bearing this in mind, it could be the case that what was driving this teacher's assessment practice was less about her learning conceptualisations and more about how she interpreted teacher expertise. Pryor & Crossouard's (2008) framework identifying various educator identities could help to explain that it is likely that Lily exercised formative assessment by playing different subject positions that shaped the interactions with her students (see Chapter 2; subsection 2.5.3.1). Therefore, this teacher may have exerted a '*subject expert*' identity when enacting verbal feedback inside the classroom (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). She provided the pupils with experiences to explore and negotiate criteria in practice. Through this, the tools of the subject discipline were available for pupils, giving more room to deepen understanding. However, when feedback was provided for pupils' written work, Lily appeared to move on to an identity as '*assessor*'. She acquired the foremost role in defining aspects of quality and also took the main responsibility of instructing the pupils so as to get them through the pre-established criteria. Unlike what was observed within oral feedback, they could not discuss or make judgments on their peers' work, as the teacher thought they were not able to accomplish this in a written format. Pryor & Crossouard (2008) contend that '*subject expert*' is an identity mainly exerted through divergent assessment, whereas an '*assessor*' establishes a hierarchical relationship with the students, through convergent assessment. Perhaps, these

concepts can help in explaining how Lily was enacting feedback, for she gave spaces for discussion within spoken interaction, but was of the opinion that ultimately only the teacher could determine quality and perform assessment.

- Sophie

One element in Sophie's assessment practices highlights a formative assessment approach that uses feedback information to plan further whole class teaching. However, she seemed to interpret this principle as a way of primarily identifying areas of problems, weaknesses and misunderstandings. Consequently, she would introduce additional activities, exercises or materials in order to practise and reinforce those deficit aspects in the next lesson. In doing so, the pupils would not be taught in the next skills to be developed until the previous piece of content was mastered, which resembles a behaviourist perspective in terms of how student should learn (James, 2006). The next extract taken from the analysis in Chapter 4 (subsection 4.4.3) is illustrative of her view:

*... You might say... "Oh, it really struggled today lots of them didn't get it – going to repeat this lesson tomorrow." So then everything gets pushed back a day but the nice thing is you have the ability to do that. There's no point pushing children on, if something is wrong, if they are not getting it then you have to look at your teaching and say, "Well something I did was wrong, I need to find a different way of doing it." (Sophie, St Andrew's School. Int- 3:17)*

This idea of looking back and working again on what went wrong was repeatedly expressed by this participant teacher at different times during her account. Having said this, it is important to note that Sophie seemed to be in a constant state of conflict regarding the ways in which she conducted her teaching and what she believed formative assessment involved. Across classroom episodes, Sophie was dealing with competing priorities, such as correctness vs. understanding and completing vs. interpreting the task. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, what seemed to prevail was the link between her assessment practices and remedial actions.

Further, what has emerged from the analysis is that, for her, feedback should help children to be reflective about their own work (see Chapter 4; subsection 4.4.3), and she regarded this as the overarching aim of the modelling strategy ... *'I think the*

*modelling is really important for children – I know it is because if you don't model, you don't get the quality of work...*' (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int- 3:7). But she also reported that she was struggling with translating this purpose into classroom practice. This was picked up in data from the observed lessons, for instance, in episodes 2 and 3 (subsection 4.4.1), where the boundaries between modelling and giving pupils instructions appeared to overlap. The implications of these findings for pupils' exploration of quality have been discussed above (subsection 8.2.2), where it has been pointed out that despite the teacher's solicitude or concern in promoting further pupil reflection, quality of work was defined through an analytical approach.

The analysis of the interview data (subsection 4.4.3) shows that Sophie believed that a possible explanation for the complexities she faced in classroom, when doing modelling, sprang from the need to unravel which strategies could be helpful for children with different levels of abilities in the same class. Her means of resolving this was to give different feedback according to her consideration as to whether a child had low, middle, or high ability. As a result, she made a person oriented assessment, same as Lily, but unlike her, Sophie would attempt to enact this in both spoken interaction and when marking the students' books. The teacher gave a detailed account on this matter (Chapter 4; subsection: 4.5.2) when describing the different kind of prompts contained within her written comments (the concrete examples can be seen in figures 4.1 and 4.2).

The analysis also foregrounds that the support given when marking the students' books was concerned with showing the pupils how much they had achieved and what they might need to improve. Sophie described how all the work undertaken around learning objectives and success criteria did not yet constitute a tool that could help children grasp what makes successful a piece of work. However, she anticipated that it could be possible in the future for pupils to mark pieces of work. In other words, she expected this would change to the extent they could train the children to do that and more time is invested in doing marking.

Sophie seemed to collect and interpret evidence from the learners mainly to identify what had not been achieved, which resonates with a traditional view about learning and the remedial role of feedback. This was intertwined with the notion that most of

pupils were not able to grasp complex aspects of quality and hence, play a more active part in their learning (see Chapter 4; subsection 4.4.3). This left Sophie, as the teacher, playing a pivotal role in carrying out assessment, i.e. she adopted the identity of ‘assessor’, as explained by Pryor & Crossouard (2008). Regarding which, the data illustrate how Sophie exercised the role of establishing the criteria and making judgments about the students work both in verbal and written forms of feedback. In addition, this teacher expressed the view that it was her responsibility, if the learning did not take place, as can be seen in this statement taken from subsection 4.4.3:

*If they haven't learned what I wanted them to learn at the beginning of the lesson, then I haven't done my job and what I have to do now is try to think of as many ways as possible to help them to meet that objective... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int- 2:10)*

In my analysis, I pointed out that this teacher's role in providing feedback can be characterised as her aiming to remove all the obstacles hindering pupils' learning and consequently, the focus was on remediation. For her, the function of formative assessment was to make up for what had not been learned.

- Carolyn

Carolyn's verbal feedback and the procedures employed by her to judge pupils writing tasks appear to have been driven by the same underlying principles. A salient feature in her approach was to establish success criteria and to communicate them to her pupils, as clearly as possible. In formative assessment the understanding of goals and criteria is also crucial for children's learning. However, the extracts from the lessons observed reveal that Carolyn applied these tools with a very different orientation. She addressed aspects of quality in terms of separate strands, which she set in advance and used as a basis against which to check whether every element was present or absent within the task carried out. This notion resonates with the ways she described her lessons, as was seen in Chapter 6 (subsection 6.4.3). She was interested in specifying all the features that define a kind of text as she believed that this would make it clear to her students how to accomplish the written task. The episode 9 (subsection 6.4.1) is an example that reflects this teacher's intention, where she taught her pupils how to identify personification, metaphors, effective verbs and so on, within



a descriptive text. From the analysis, I contend that this perspective is linked with behaviourist theories of learning (James, 2006), because the complex aim of writing a description was decomposed into different parts, which were practised afterwards, thus implying a sense of hierarchy.

The analysis of classroom episodes reveals that performance was interpreted as either correct or incorrect, in spite of the peer-assessment activities that were enacted within these interactions. It could be said that some of the procedures implemented by Carolyn, which potentially could foster formative action, did not fulfil their original purpose, such as peer assessment. This is supposed to help students in developing an understanding of quality by providing them with the experience to reflect on their work (Sadler, 1989; Black et al., 2003). However, this intention seems to have been blurred in practice, for in some of the sequences examined the pupils were encouraged to comment on each other's work based on a comparison with previous performance of other students on the same task (see episode 10; subsection 6.4.2). Or, it was the case that the implementation of some strategies, such as WWW and EBI comments, drafted by peers, did not thrive due to the ways the sequences were unfolded. Thus, the teacher's adherence to these procedures did not allow to clearly discern whether they helped or hindered learning autonomy, or whether it opened or limited the possibilities for exploration of quality (see episode 11; subsection 6.4.2). I brought these issues together in the discussion in subsection 8.2.1, arguing that Carolyn seemed to interpret a key aspect of a formative assessment approach (providing next steps) as testing instead of helping the pupils to make improvements. I believe that the evidence from different data sets illustrate that, in Carolyn's observed practice, assessment was informed by what appears to have been the teacher's view about learning, which as such constitutes some elements of a transmissionist approach.

Carolyn's work, represented in both spoken interaction and written forms, was strongly oriented towards a 'tightly sequenced set of learning objectives' (Swaffield, 2011: 439). All the procedures she implemented appear to have been designed to get the students to perform well with reference to the pre-specified objectives. So, no

matter how often she incorporated strategies, such as peer assessment, communicating criteria or feedback with written comments using WWW or EBI, the nature of the formative purpose was not pupil-oriented. I have selected the following extract from the analysis section in Chapter 6 (subsection 6.5.3) to show that the teacher's own perspective was that these procedures would not work well for all the children in her class, especially for those she considered low achievers:

*Again...I do think sometimes some children don't benefit from it. It is normally those children who are lower-attainers ...So actually in an ideal world you would have very simple success criteria for those children because in a way it is quite unfair to give them all of these things to include when they may not be able to... (Carolyn, St Thomas's Primary School. Int- 3: 5)*

From this it can be surmised that Carolyn, whilst continuing to provide her pupils with information about success criteria and learning objectives and making an effort to check individual attainment, she could not take into consideration all the individual pupils' positions and their readiness regarding the next move. This suggests that the teacher was focussed on how to accomplish the letter of an assessment for learning approach, but not its spirit, as described by Marshall & Drummond (2006).

To summarise, my analysis of the data sets and the follow-up discussion show that there are multiple layers of complexity when teachers are carrying out formative assessment. Some would appear to believe that learning takes place mostly in spoken interaction and that when it is written it is not necessarily formative in that their focus shifts towards applying standard baseline judgments. Others seem to commit to a socio-constructivist approach, whereby they do not provide detailed instant advice, but rather encourage and leave the pupils to think for themselves and develop their own ideas by providing opportunities for these instances to come up during interactions. Some others make judgments on a case by case basis, according to whether they feel their students have the ability to move on. When they deem this to be the case, they offer one kind of advice, whereas when they do not think this is possible, they give different prompts. Consequently, their formative action is bounded by a person oriented assessment of the pupils' potential abilities

at particular points in time. Finally, some others perform all the formative assessment procedures and would look at every technique except that they believe some pupils may not benefit from their support. In sum, the findings strongly suggest that formative assessment is a multi-faceted and multi-layered phenomenon.

## Chapter 9

### Concluding Remarks

#### 9.1 Introduction

This study was designed to investigate teachers' interpretations of feedback in terms of theory and practice and involved exploring how this might be informed by their conceptions of how students learn. Three teachers of Year 5 and one of a Year 4 classes from three different primary schools in London were involved in the research. The data were gathered through classroom observation and teachers' interviews. A number of literacy lessons were observed throughout a period that lasted from October 2013 to March 2014. Follow-up interviews with the teachers were carried out in order to invite teachers to reflect upon specific instances within the classroom episodes. A semi-structured interview format was used to explore the teachers' interpretation and intentions in the feedback process, with reference to pupils' written assignments.

These concluding remarks focus on the key issues involved in the main research question: *How do teachers interpret feedback from a theoretical and practical standpoint in relation to their teaching and their students' learning?* I draw upon the findings that arose from the data analysis in chapters 4 to 7 and the subsequent discussion in chapter 8.

#### 9.2 Main findings: feedback provided in spoken interaction and in written work

In the context of the observed lessons, the teachers' practices revolved around providing feedback that drew upon the communication of assessment criteria and the learning objective. Within verbal feedback, they displayed examples to model pieces of writing and used questioning, which were at the heart of the teacher-student interaction, along with oral comments when pupils presented aloud pieces of their work in progress or just before completion. For written feedback, they implemented highlighting procedures and comments, which were also structured around the

learning objective and success criteria. That is to say, the findings reflected the implementation of strategies related to those areas that are recognised as being formative in various research works (see chapter 2: section 2.6). However, the study also revealed that the enactment of these practices was driven by a set of principles that permeated and gave singularities to the teachers' actions and seemed to be consistent with different interpretations of feedback as a process and formative assessment as a framework.

To explore how these tenets came interplayed in practice, classroom episodes were selected, because they potentially provided pupils with opportunities to explore what quality meant when they were engaging with learning tasks. Specifically, for those activities in which the teachers monitored pupils' knowledge or understanding of the criteria, my analysis focused on the nature of the exchanges, with the aim being to determine whether they pertained to providing pupils with prompts about what needed to be done in order to complete the task or whether the intention was the enhancement of the quality of future work (Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003). Those strategies that the teachers used to collect evidence on their pupils' progress, before completing the final product, were examined, so as to discern whether they gave support to learners on their interpretation of the task at hand (Black et al., 2003) or whether these actions were driven by some other kind of reference point, for instance, to ensure the task was on target (Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

Associated with the above, understanding the nature of questioning and classroom talk, was crucial to determining whether the balance of feedback interactions was oriented towards correctness or understanding. Accordingly, attention was paid to how questions were framed and the ways in which the participant teachers seemed to interpret the student responses (Black & 2009, Wiliam 2012; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Leung, 2008), thereby elucidating what feedback meant to the four participant teachers.

The analysis of the observation data was complemented by follow up interviews with the teachers in order to illustrate their own perspectives about the ways they went

about providing guidance and making judgments during the process of interaction with the children.

In my previous chapter, the findings that emerged from both data sources were further discussed under the heading 'Exploring quality in spoken interaction' (see subsection 8.2.2.1).

Regarding written feedback, semi structured interviews were partly carried out in order to gather data about teachers' view points on their marking procedures. The dominant strategies that the teachers dealt with, and their implications for students' exploration of quality, were discussed also in detail in the previous chapter (see subsection 8.2.2.2).

In chapter 8, I synthesised the evidence regarding the different ways that feedback is conceptualised. I adopted the term next steps to illustrate this, as it represents the essential point of formative assessment, which is helping pupils' learning, as well as allowing for the uncovering of the participant teachers' individual approaches to students' exploration of quality. Thus, informing about two of the issues sought in this research: *'What are the teachers' feedback practices and the underlying principles that guide them in the actual conducting of classroom interaction and through pupils' written assignments?'* and *'What are the notions that teachers recognise as salient within a formative assessment approach and how do they explain their meanings?'*

### **9.2.1 Next steps as testing: restricted exploration of quality**

Within this perspective, the teacher's feedback relates to what has been achieved and what not in order to identify what still needs to be done to meet the learning objective. In Carolyn's observed lessons feedback appeared to be focused on finding out whether the pupils were clear about all the requirements of a piece of work, which were pre-established and communicated to them in a variety of forms. These requirements were spelled out separately or they were set out as criteria sheets and used as one of the tools to assess pieces of writing. In her follow up interviews, Carolyn highlighted the use of check lists as a tool for teaching and assessment, which suggests an analytic approach to defining the quality of work (Sadler, 1989, 2007, 2010). Hence,

the focus was on corroborating whether the pre-specified features were present or absent in the piece of writing, rather than encouraging pupils to make judgments about the work as a whole, in terms of its purpose or its meaning. As Sadler points out, to describe quality in this way can limit the possibilities for children to experience how to make multi-criterion judgements. In the teacher's account, she made reference to formative assessment using concepts such as frequent assessment or testing. Furthermore, the interactions illustrated that questioning was carried out by conveying ambiguous messages. Sometimes the interactions started with prompts that seemed to elicit from the pupils descriptive comments on the others work, however they turned to being narrowed down to promoting recall and guessing (see episodes 9-10-11; subsection 6.4.1). These findings confirm the relevance of paying attention to questioning in any endeavour that pursues formative assessment in classroom (Black et al., 2003; Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001). When discussing these data in chapter 8 it was suggested that those actions that involved teachers providing clues to their students regarding what was lacking shaped the interaction within a type of talk identified as recitation (Alexander, 2004). Then, by considering all these constituents together these feedback practices were associated with elements that resonate with convergent assessment, as described by Torrance & Pryor (1998, 2001).

From my analysis of the marking of the students' books, the idea of preparing pupils to perform well became apparent. The written comments emphasised specific points of grammar, punctuation or other aspects needed, with reference to the kind of text or genre (see chapter 6; see subsection 6.5.2) and they appear to have been structured in consonance with the success criteria list incorporated within the students' books. Moreover, despite the teacher implementing peer assessment, she seemed not to believe that this strategy helped her pupils to develop a broader understanding of quality (see chapter 6; subsection 6.5.3), expressing the view that most were unable to make judgments about others' work, especially low-achievers.

### **9.2.2 Next steps as remediation: limited exploration of quality**

There was less of a sense of testing regarding Sophie's approach to feedback. However, observation of classroom episodes and her own account convey the notion of her trying to reconcile competing priorities. In particular, she struggled to find a balance between communicating criteria in order to clarify how the task needed to be accomplished and negotiating those that had the purpose of achieving a broader understanding of quality. In essence, she wanted her pupils to close the gap in their learning, but when she felt they had not got the point, she would reinforce those elements that impeded the learning from taking place. As a consequence, I consider next steps for this teacher amounted to a process of remediation (Perrenoud, 1998). The observed exchanges appeared to be more geared towards correctness in spite of her declared intention to get her pupils to reflect on their work. During the observed exchanges, she addressed basic and complex aspects of quality writing as well as stressing understanding of the subject matter. However, notions of quality remained tightly connected to this teacher's expectations and instructions, thus rendering an analytical approach to its determination (Sadler, 1989). This was also reflected in her questioning, whereby in some instances she appeared to encourage pupils to share ideas, but the tenor of the exchanges shifted towards instruction and recitation (Alexander, 2004) (see analysis of classroom episodes subsections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). All in all, within verbal feedback and as I contended in the discussion of the data (see chapter 8), for Sophie Class Teacher, assessment was approached from the point of view of considering what might fit with the curricula and the pupils did not have an active role, thus resembling a convergent approach to assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001).

Sophie's approach to marking the students' work complemented her feedback in class. Again, she reported that the overarching aim when providing feedback should be to get pupils to reflect on their work and hence, the marking process was focused on learning objectives and success criteria as being the factors that determined what counted as good quality. However, she considered that given the early stage of development of the marking procedures within her school, the pupils had yet to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of the criteria (see chapter 4; subsection 4.5.3)



### **9.2.3 Next steps as moving forward: some signals for quality negotiation in spoken interaction**

According to the observation data from Steve's lessons, next steps seem to be aligned with those elements that can add quality. This occurred in spite of the teacher-student exchanges appearing not to promote extended lines of inquiry. The interactions revealed that while the teacher seemed to follow his own agenda, he did allow the students' engagement as initiators and his examples for defining quality did not go completely uncontested. The pupils were clearly confident in talking about the structure of the writing, or about the kind of arguments to introduce for the task at hand. The teacher acknowledged these propositions, which helped in shaping the idea that the criteria for quality, rather than being set in stone, were subject to continuous adjustment through an ongoing process. In terms of how this was expressed through questioning, in the discussion chapter, I pointed out that Steve seemed to apply a conversational technique that Mercer (2000) identifies as elicitation (see episodes 6 and 8 in subsections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2, respectively). He posed questions that referred pupils back to previous pieces of work that appear to be important to consider for being successful in the task at hand. Moreover, he and his pupils seemed to share a common understanding of what went on during interaction. As a result, there was a sense of pupils thinking and interpreting the tasks they were dealing with as well as the teacher directing their efforts towards what they needed to improve, which is indicative of formative action.

Nevertheless, this teacher's approach to providing verbal feedback appeared to differ when it came to marking the pupils' written work, as the focus turned to being standards based and the emphasis being placed on corrections. The unique notion that remained stable across both forms of feedback (verbal- written) was the reported high expectations of the teacher about what his pupils could do in relation to his judgments and pieces of advice and the extent to which they could understand the criteria. That is, the interview data from Steve showed his confidence that students' had the capability to unpack the messages given throughout his marking procedures. But, unlike what occurred within spoken interaction, the data pertaining to feedback relating to writing did not show any evidence about how this process

was unfolded (see chapter 5 subsection 5.5.3 and further discussion in chapter 8 subsection 8.2.2.3).

From the analysis of selected episodes pertaining to Lily's observed lessons, emerged the notion of making judgments about the quality of work as a whole. While she shared with her children some schematic structures to produce a sort of text, her verbal feedback, conveyed the idea that a piece of writing should achieve its purpose and that is the most relevant aspect of quality. In the analysis and discussion of the data, I concluded that Lily's work resembled configurational assessment (Sadler, 1989, 2007, 2010), because the pupils were given the opportunity to understand that they could have a different structure or choose alternative ways to present their work, both of which can be considered as representing good quality. Hence, there were opportunities for the pupils to grasp the notion that quality can be judged by drawing on the interrelation amongst criteria, rather than according to separated individual features. The data from the lessons observed also illustrated that Lily encouraged pupils' contributions in devising a model for writing, which she achieved by promoting dialogue between her pupils that allowed for the collective creation of ideas. These findings resonate with this teacher's value of questioning as a crucial tool to expand pupils' thinking and reflection. This, alongside evidence collected from observation (see episode 13; subsection 7.4.1), allowed me to assert that some signs of discussion and dialogue types of talk were observed within these interactions (Alexander, 2004; Wolf & Alexander, 2008). During Lily's lessons, pupils were encouraged to make further exploration of what quality of work meant and thus, it can be seen that this was open to negotiation.

However, and similar to Steve practices, the approach enacted by Lily in the face to face classroom support contrasted markedly with the procedures employed by her when it came to marking her pupils' written work. She made reference to the success criteria list as a relevant tool for students to assess their work and reported her abandonment of widespread peer assessment, opting only for its limited use for smaller pieces of writing. Lily also expressed the view that her students were not capable of articulating notions of quality and being able to communicate them to others (see chapter 7 subsection 7.5.3) and further discussion in chapter 8 (subsection

8.2.2.3). She also contended that pupils could not perform peer marking, especially those she considered low achievers. This perspective clearly contradicts with what was observed during verbal interaction, where pupils discussed the quality of the work in progress or were invited to externalise how they understood the processes involved (see subsections 7.4.1 and 7.4.3)

In the previous chapter (see subsection 8.2.2.2), I explored in detail the teachers' use of underlining procedures and written comments. In this chapter, I do not revisit these strategies as the aim here is to indicate, holistically, how the approaches to verbal and written feedback interacted in the work of the participant teachers. Regarding which, three salient findings are summarised below.

Firstly, in the face to face interaction, the approach to feedback was more flexible than what the teachers did in relation to written work, which was particularly evident within practices enacted by two of the participant teachers (Steve Class Teacher, St Albert's Primary School and Lily Class Teacher, St Thomas Primary School). Having noted the singularities above, the teacher-student exchanges appear to have been balanced towards the promotion of formative action in that opportunities were provided for them to develop a sense of quality. However, their written feedback was much more structured and limited; closely linked to judgment and performance.

Secondly, and again noting the singularities earlier described, some of the participant teachers shared the view that the marking system was not particularly helpful for students' learning, but nevertheless this work for all of them was tied very precisely to the learning objectives and success criteria. Consequently, as discussed in the previous chapter (subsection 8.2.2.3), marking appears not to have been conceptualised as feedback, but more as a set of strategies for record evidence of quality, the structure and framing, for which were not entirely dependent on the teacher. Marking is also a way to respond to the demands made by external stakeholders as the evidence recorded in pupils' books could be scrutinised by others within the school and beyond. So, the child is not the only audience regarding interpretation of the teachers' marking system.

Thirdly, on the whole, marking procedures have more in common with summative assessment. Given the emphasis on specific aspects of writing, such as grammar, spelling and punctuation, it could be that these are considered not negotiable within the teachers' minds. Despite the specific techniques used by each teacher, for all of them, the focus was on establishing what elements were present or absent within a piece of writing, so that the pupils would be able to recall what to include next time. All of the features of this process have resonance with convergent assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998, 2001).

### **9.3 Main findings: learning and assessment**

The inquiry, 'How much do assumptions about learning underpin teachers' feedback practices?', pertained to the search for an understanding of the participants' theoretical views on feedback and stems from the main research question that drove the study. Insights and evidence regarding this matter were obtained by contrasting different data sets, including the analysis of classroom episodes, the teachers' reflections on what they did within lessons and their views on written feedback as expressed during interview. In chapter 8, I made reference to the underlying principles of learning that each participant teacher appears to have subscribed to and the extent to which these informed their approaches to assessment (see section 8.3). In this regard, the data suggest that the teachers held different purposes for learning and assessment, which seemingly influenced their decisions and practices inside the classroom. This resulted in a mismatch between their intended purpose and action when teachers attempted to put their lesson plans into action in the classroom. While there was diversity in practice, the teachers attempted their lesson activities and the strategies they used, within their pedagogy, were intended to focus the learners on learning and improvement, the assessment implemented when they came to make judgements and provide feedback often failed to focus on the formative and instead led students to understanding feedback as advice to correct work. In addition, the findings were also illustrative of what appeared to be, for some teachers, dissimilar perspectives of how students should learn within their own repertoire of feedback practices. In the next subsection, I call attention to the main points that distinguish the

contrasting perspectives that emerged.

### **9.3.1 Different purposes of learning and assessment within the teachers' own repertoire of feedback practices**

Steve Class Teacher, St Albert's Primary School seemed to have developed a view of learning that was primarily socio-constructivist during face to face interaction, but when it came to written feedback, or when he was marking pupils' work, it would appear that he switched to a different approach, one involving standard based judgments. Regarding his classroom interaction, key pedagogical principles can be identified in relation to how he appears to have believed students learn. Firstly, he provided feedback by deciding not to give answers immediately when pupils needed support and instead, referred them back to retrieve previous pieces of teaching, thus tasking them with making sense for themselves of the new aspects of learning. Secondly, he and his students seemed to share a common understanding of an assessment event, with many of the latter making confident unrequested contributions. These often addressed aspects of quality writing that had been not already established by the teacher, thus indicating that opportunities for the negotiation of quality were being provided.

The interview findings revealed Steve's belief that it was important to get everybody involved in discussion, that is, for him, talk was considered as a tool for articulating pupils' thinking. He also brought up the notion of children working together, expressing the view that this would benefit those having difficulties, whereby dialogue with more capable children would help them achieve learning objectives. He explained that he, on a regular basis, proactively endeavoured to create classroom situations for this. The corresponding analytical chapter (see subsection 5.4.3) and also chapter 8 developed the argument of this teacher's perspective being aligned with sociocultural theories of learning and specifically, with the Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development (1978). However, I would like to re-emphasise that the data suggested that Steve having this interpretation of how students learn only seemed to inform his approach to assessment within classroom interaction. For, as it has already been

pointed out, his stance when he assessed written work appears not to have been the same. He seemed to believe that learning takes place mostly in interaction of a spoken form and when he carried out marking it was not really formative.

Lily's feedback practices seem to have been informed by sociocultural theories of learning, within spoken interaction. Throughout the episodes observed, she developed a line of inquiry such that pupils' ideas appeared to be built upon what others were saying and she came across as being committed to promoting their meta-cognition, as she tried to get the students to reflect on their pieces of work. In her interview, she was mindful about how children talking, thinking and learning are inextricably linked. Thus, as stated in the discussion of these data (see chapter 8), her feedback appears to have been exploratory and provisional (Marshall & Drummond, 2006; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). The observation data illustrates that Lily and her students were involved with more complex dimensions of formative assessment. Nevertheless, when she reported on the marking of her students' books, a dissimilar outlook arose. She expressed a different view about her pupils' abilities and how much they could do (see chapter 7 section 7.5). For instance, she commented that not all her students would be able to perform peer-marking and consequently, her written feedback was based on her previous assessment of the pupils' potential abilities (see chapter 8 section 8.3). When discussing these findings, I suggested that this marked contrast within the teacher's enactment of assessment might have emerged from her adopting different identity positions (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). In the classroom, she provided spaces for discussion and would allow negotiation of the criteria. However, in relation to written work, she seemed to believe only the teacher could determine quality and perform assessment.

### **9.3.2 Approaches to assessment that seem to be informed by a behaviourist view of learning**

Sophie Class Teacher, St Andrew's Primary School, described formative assessment as an approach that served to inform her planning. However, her observed practice involved taking remedial action, whereby in the next lesson she would include additional material to reinforce those elements that had been identified as

problematic and could have been impeding the children's learning. When the knowledge within these areas or pieces of content had been acquired the children could be taught the next skills (See analysis in Chapter 4 subsection 4.4.3).

Theoretically, Sophie's stance resembles a behaviourist perspective in terms of how students learn (James, 2006). Although, it is important to say that there was a sense, across classroom episodes, of Sophie dealing with competing aims, such as asking for corrections or promoting understanding, modelling to help students to interpret the task at hand or providing instructions in order to complete the task. In addition, Sophie expressed the belief that most of her pupils could not understand the concept of quality and consequently, she oriented her feedback according to her previous assessment of each pupil's potential ability to deal with particular tasks. Moreover, she also developed the view that if pupils do not learn the responsibility rely on herself, (see chapter 4 subsection 4.4.3 and chapter 8 section 8.3).

The sequences examined during Carolyn's lessons illustrate that performance was interpreted either as correct or incorrect. The interview data showed that assessment *for* learning and frequent testing were blurred concepts, according to the teacher's descriptions of her practices (chapter 6; subsection 6.4.3). In terms of teaching the complex writing of a text, she would break it down into different parts, which were subsequently practised, thus implying a sense of hierarchy. Hence, Carolyn's approach to assessment would appear to have been informed by a behaviourist view of learning (James, 2006) (see discussion in chapter 8 section 8.3). Consequently, the techniques that she applied in the classroom seem to have been designed to get the students to perform well with reference to the pre-specified objective. The observation data show that she often implemented strategies such as peer assessment, communicating criteria, feedback by comments using the WWW and EBI structures. According to the literature, these can be useful techniques for fostering formative action, but this intentionality did not play out fully. For instance, the analysis of classroom episodes illustrated that the activities in Carolyn's lessons were not pupil oriented. Her view of teaching and learning was very much in terms of delivering a curriculum to the pupils with an assessment system that checked on that delivery. Also, from the teacher's own

reflections arose the idea of that these procedures might not work well for all the children in her class, especially, for those she considered low achievers (see chapter 6 subsection 6.4.3 and chapter 8 section 8.3). This suggested that Carolyn's approach was far from pupil-centred and this, in turn, affected her interpretation of formative assessment.

#### **9.4 Implications for professional development**

The two previous sections of this chapter (9.2 and 9.3) have outlined the key findings that have arisen from this study. In this section, I sketch out some considerations about what some of its implications would be in terms of professional development.

It could be said that it is necessary to ponder how multifaceted and multi-layered a phenomenon, formative assessment can be. The outcomes of this research have shown how the teachers held various concepts around key issues, which were commonly referred to in their practices and descriptions. For instance, feedback should help pupils to take next steps in learning, was given a range of connotations, from testing (Carolyn Class teacher) and remediation (Sophie Class Teacher), to moving forward (Steve and Lily); the last two exhibiting some differences in practice. Hence, any teacher development initiative might be strengthened by supporting them to develop more awareness of what their concepts are, or what are the intentions or possibilities in helping pupils learning behind any suggested strategy or innovation.

In this study, the terms formative assessment and feedback were regarded by the participant teachers as effective ways for helping their students to learn better, but they interpreted this variously, thereby enacting it differently during the observed lessons. Steve appears to have subscribed to a socio-constructivist approach in the course of face to face interaction, but when he formalised his judgments in his students' books, the strategies employed were much more standards driven. Lily would allow children to negotiate criteria for quality and extended the lines of inquiry to get the pupils to reflect on the task at hand, but when it came to written work she expressed a contrasting view about what the pupils were able to do. Sophie would make judgments on a case by case basis by offering different kinds of advice or



prompts, depending on whether or not she thought her students had the ability to move on at particular moment in time. Carolyn was concerned about the implementation of various formative assessment procedures in spite of her opinion that some pupils might not benefit from them. That is the techniques would not be helpful in the understanding of quality and so the original intention would not play out. These are examples of the complexities that arose in implementing formative assessment. The teachers appeared to be guided by different principles, which were not the same in all situations, or it may be the case their practices cannot respond to what they think it should be due to other issues and constraints located in the wider context in which the practices are unfolded (see Sophie Class Teacher; subsection 4.4.1; or Carolyn Class Teacher; subsection 6.4.1). So, regarding professional development, it would appear to be necessary to come to a greater appreciation of the variety of possibilities of the impact of different responses to assessment data and the likely effect this might have on learners. This might be achieved by focusing more on the response to assessment data rather than strongly focusing on ways of collecting them as most Assessment for Learning strategies tend to do. What is clear is that teachers need to discuss formative action, reasons for taking those actions and their predicted effect on pupils' future learning and the actions that teachers might take in planning next steps. As part of this more sophisticated approach to formative assessment, teachers within their own school context, might need to negotiate with colleagues how to approach formative assessment, and specifically how to use feedback effectively.

This study has captured the momentum within each participant teacher's trajectory of implementing formative assessment (Black et al., 2003). During the research phase, they were not taking part in any particular initiative of professional development in relation to assessment for learning and the data were gathered in a naturally occurring setting. There was Steve at St. Albert's Primary School, who seemed to provide feedback (in spoken interaction) according to his own pedagogical commitment about how students should learn. Careful analysis of classroom episodes allowed for discerning that while he did not seem to promote an approach based on extended lines of inquiry, his students participated and discussed aspects of quality writing on an

ongoing basis. Thus, he appeared to be quite autonomous and purposeful, the kind of professional that can be seen as independent (Leung, 2009).

Meanwhile, Carolyn at St Thomas's Primary School, seemed to be more concerned about the use of procedures to communicate criteria and consistently applying some structures for peer marking, whilst at the same time appearing not to believe in the effectiveness of this strategy. Carolyn stated that '*I wouldn't always do peer assessment*', which suggests that she was trying to do what was needed in the ways required and ended up providing the letter rather than the spirit of assessment for learning, as was argued in the analysis of the data. Accordingly, her professional practice resembled 'sponsored professionalism' (Leung, 2009: 50), whereby some of the actions and interactions observed within the classroom episodes and her marking procedures were in line with those strategies that were institutionally endorsed.

Sophie at St Andrew's Primary School was a teacher that often reflected on her practices and she seemed to have developed the view that what she was doing was not enough to achieve the intentionality behind a formative assessment approach. She described how difficult she found it to get the children to be reflective about their pieces of work and that they still could not come to grasp the meaning of success criteria and learning objectives (chapter 4; section 4.5.3). There was a tension in the practices observed in Sophie's lessons between the theory of learning she tried to implement (chapter 8; section 8.3), which exhibited traits of a behaviourist perspective. Consequently, her assessment strategy involved repairing what had been done wrong and providing feedback according to her previous assessment of the pupils' potential capabilities for performing the particular task.

## **9.5 Implications for research**

My work has involved drawing upon previous relevant research contributions (see chapter 2; Literature review and chapter 3; Methodology) that have shed light on how formative assessment can be enacted inside the classroom and that have also raised issues and complexities regarding its implementation. The fact that different teachers can interpret this strategy so differently is consistent with previous developments, but

I believe this study contributes new insights regarding the intricacies involved in the notion of feedback, not least by uncovering four different forms of practice. In addition, the research has brought to light the realisation that individual teachers often draw on different competing principles, that is influenced by the task at hand. The methodological approach used in this research and the qualitative data I collected gave me access to a richness of local details to understand actions and interactions in a particular context. It also enabled me to grasp a sense of formative assessment in practice in a broad sense. Some general considerations from my study are outlined below.

The data allowed me to identify specific experiences of classroom interaction, where more room was given to students in terms of exploration of what quality meant and I found it significant with regards to formative assessment. However, more work is needed to find ways in which this kind of feedback can actually support pupils to rise to the challenge of becoming truly independent learners.

In addition, it has become evident from the outcomes that further reflection is needed in terms of comprehending the nature of the conceptions of learning and assessment that are held by teachers. It is clear that teachers are attempting to satisfy several purposes of assessment when they work with learners in the classroom and while they all recognise that the formative intention is the one likely to improve learning, their concern for other purposes sometime reshapes the approach they take. It is likely that teachers need time, space and support in discussing the assessment practices they use within different classroom activities and support in deciding how and when to focus on formative assessment and when to focus on other purposes.

## **9.6 Limitations of the project**

This research has involved investigating feedback and formative assessment from the teachers' perspective, being aimed at acquiring an in depth understanding of how feedback is enacted and interpreted. My interest was to collect data rich enough to develop an iterative process of analysis that would allow me to tell the story pertaining to the four participant teachers. However, I did not collect data relating students'

points of view; they were not interviewed at any time. That is, pupils' insights or how they seemed to react to feedback was captured only through observation, within whole class teaching.

My sample size was small, but in wanting to gain rich data over several lessons, I was happy with the selection of teachers. Even though only the practice of four teachers were explored, I found quite a diverse range of practice suggesting that, across a bigger sample, we might find even greater differences. What the study exemplifies was a need for teachers to be made more aware of how their teaching and assessment practices match their intended practice and how their view of learning might open up or close down such practice. Further study would provide information on how wide a range of beliefs and practice there is in terms of feedback and formative practice in the primary classroom.

Moreover, in further work, back into my home country, I would take into account the differences in the school settings, the curriculum, and what teachers are actually being told to do. I would apply similar methodology, but also have interviews with the teachers first to be clear about beliefs and intentions before I see them in action during lessons. I would also have interviews with the head teachers and possibly with the inspectors, in order to have a wider range of the opinions before going into the classroom.

### **9.7 Significance of the study and further work to be carried out by the researcher**

While many researchers have discussed the theory and effectiveness of formative practice (Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 2006, 2009, 2012; Hargreaves, 2005; Sadler, 2010; Torrance & Pryor, 2001; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008; Torrance, 2012; Klenowski, 2009; Swaffield, 2011) and some have described and explained what this practice looks like in the classroom (Harrison & Howard, 2009; Clarke, 2001) , this study focuses specifically on feedback practices and how these play out in primary classrooms. As such, it adds greatly to the field. What the study exemplifies is that teaching and assessment practices may not match the intended practice and how

views of learning might open up or close down such practice. For teachers to be aware of this, they need help in reflecting on their plans and practice.

An important task to carry out after this PhD programme is to build vignettes to obtain a composite picture of the four participant teachers, and invite them to look at what they do and say, as a way of reflecting on their own beliefs, values and practices. As this study has elicited that they have different positions on learning, teaching and assessment, then in terms of professional development, these vignettes may contribute to making them realise or be more reflective about what their conceptualisations are. This could lead to them seeing more clearly how they are undertaking formative assessment. For instance, in the context of this study, Carolyn St. Thomas's Primary School, would never look very different, from her point of view, from anybody else's approach, but the data showed how Lily Class Teacher, who works at the same school enacted assessment practices in a very different way, at least, in relation to spoken interaction. This indicates that, whilst these teachers strongly held beliefs on how to carry out assessment, they did not necessarily talk about it very much. Therefore, what has been proposed above could be an opportunity for them to re-engage with the whole process and to think about those tensions that the data revealed. Just to mention one example, how to find a balance between communicating criteria to students so they can know what quality involves, whilst not losing sight of the formative purpose and hence, move on to an instrumentalist use of these criteria (Torrance, 2007).

In this study, I have looked at all the different ways the participant teachers were providing feedback and I have attempted to ascertain what they believed was actually happening. I have tried to obtain a holistic view of this phenomenon, thereby bringing me closer to the reality of the teaching in the three primary schools. By paying detailed attention to how teachers go about their business in the classroom, I began to identify their practices and I could see that how assessment was being delivered as well as how it was experienced by the children. This study contributes with this very important insight. That is not to say that the data are true to every classroom, but I would contend that I have set out now an additional vision for people to see through my lens, differently, formative assessment in their own contexts.

Therefore, a future work for me also would involve distilling progressively the lessons I have learnt from the practices and views shared by the participant teachers into little stories and make them accessible to teachers to help them to reflect on their own positions, but now in the context of the work I do in Chile, which relates to teacher education.

Finally, I have considered further studies using similar methodological approaches in order to understand more how other teachers working in a very different context may have very different ways of seeing and doing, and how this might influence the ways they deal with feedback and formative assessment. I think this approach would help to uncover teachers' thinking and how this impacts on practice.

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## Appendix 1: Overview of kind of lesson phases

An Example from Steve, Class Teacher, St. Albert's Primary School

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	
06/11/13 Lesson 1 File: 711 0033	Discussion content	Revision work	Writing	Revision work					
	Literary text referenced: <i>The Way Home</i> by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers								
13/11/13 Lesson2 File: 711 0065	Business	Introduction	Discussion content	Revision work					
	Literary text referenced: <i>The Way Home</i> by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers								
13/11/13 Lesson 3 File: 711 0066	Introduction	Discussion content	Writing						
	Literary text referenced: <i>The Way Home</i> by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers								

20/11/20 Lesson 4 File: 711 0078	Introduction	Discussion Content	Writing	Revision work	Writing	Revision work			
	Literary text referenced: <i>The Way Home</i> by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers								
12/02/14 Lesson 5 File: 711 0111	Business	Introduction	Writing						
	Topic of the writing: Should chocolate be rationed to once a year on your birthay?								
12/02/14 Lesson 6 File:711 0112	Introduction	Discussion content	Writing						
	Topic of the writing: Should chocolate be rationed to once a year on your birthay?								
19/March/14 Lesson7 File: 711 0148	Business	Introduction	Discussion content	Writing	Revision Work				
	Topic of the writing: Bible story of the creation								
19/March/14 Lesson8 File:	Writing	Revision work	Writing						

711 0149									
	Topic of the writing: Bible story of the creation								
19/March/14 Lesson9 File: 711 0150	Writing	Revision Work.							
	Text referenced: Bible story of the creation								

## Appendix 2: Overview of classroom episodes within kind of lesson phases

### An Example from Steve, Class Teacher, St. Albert's Primary School

<b>Lesson 1; 06/11/13</b> <b>File: 711 0033</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Classroom Episodes</b>
Discussion content	Brainstorm words with alliteration, simile, metaphor and vocabulary to describe a character and setting.	Collective group work	Ep. 1 Work in trios ( <i>5' minutes</i> ) P.1.
Revision work	Provide verbal comment to the students work.	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 Seven students read aloud their work ( sentences) ( <i>8' minutes</i> ) P. 1-3
Writing	Write the opening paragraph of a story	Collaborative group work	Ep. 1: Working in trios /shared writing ( <i>12' minutes</i> )
Revision work	Provide verbal comment to the students work	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 :Students read aloud their sentences ( <i>2' minutes</i> ) P.4-5 Ep. 2 : Students read aloud their sentences ( <i>3' minutes</i> )

<b>Lesson 2 ;13/11/13</b> <b>File: 711 0065</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific Purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
Introduction	Explain the main lesson's task	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 Teacher exposition in order to introduce the task.( 7' minutes) P: 3-5
Discussion content	Discuss how to sequence a storyboard.	Collaborative group work	Ep. 1: Group discussion: how to sequence a story board by arranging pictures from the book. (14' minutes) P.5
Revision work	Provide verbal comments on students work.	Whole class teaching Collaborative group work	Ep. 1. G. 1; Storyboard presentation( 4' minutes) P. 5-8 Ep.2. G. 2; Storyboard presentation (3' minutes). P.8-10 Ep.3. G. 3; Storyboard presentation (3'minutes).P.10-11 Ep.4. G. 4; Storyboard presentation (3'minutes).P.11-12 Ep.5. G. 5; Storyboard presentation (4'minutes).P.13-15
<b>Lesson 3; 13/11/13</b> <b>File: 711 0066</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
Introduction	Explain the lesson'	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 .Teacher explains the main task ( 3'minutes) P.1-2;

	tasks		
Discussion content	Brainstorm vocabulary to effect	Collective group work Whole class teaching	Ep.1 Q & A centred on vocabulary to produce effect (15' minutes). P.2-5)
Writing	Write students' own version of a story	Independent work	Ep. 1. 20' minutes time allocated for writing.
<b>Lesson 4 ; 20/11/13 711 0078</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>episodes</b>
Introduction	-Explain the lesson' task	Whole class-teaching	Ep.1 Teacher description of the task(5' minutes) P.1-2
Discussion content	Set criteria for writing	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 Teacher exemplify some criteria for writing (5' minutes) P.2-3
writing	Write sentences to tell a story	Collaborative group work	Ep 1 ; 5' minutes allocated for writing

Revision work	Provide Verbal comment on students work	Whole class teaching	Four students read out their work (4' minutes) P.3-4 Ep.1 'I scavenged through...' Ep.2 ' <i>As I stretched ...</i> ' Ep.3 'further and further...' Ep.4 ' <i>My cat's in my cozy...</i> '
Writing	Write sentences to tell a story	Collaborative group work	Ep 1 ; 11' minutes allocated for writing
Revision work	Provide Verbal comment on students work	Whole class teaching	8 students read out their work (8' minutes) P.4-6 Ep.5' <i>I though putting the cute...</i> Ep.6 ' <i>As I strolled...</i> ' ' <i>My heart was pounding...</i> ' Ep.7 <i>Further and further I got brighter ...</i> Ep.8 <i>As I dashed across the road...</i> Ep.9 <i>As I trolled down ...</i> Ep.10 <i>I found myself ...</i> Ep.11 <i>Filthy dirty hands across ...</i> Ep.12 <i>As I made my way through...</i>
<b>Lesson 5; 12/02/14 711 0111</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	Recap content from previous lesson (language of discussion)	Collective group work Whole class teaching	Ep.1 Gathering sentences for writing a balanced argument. (10' minutes) P.1-3)



<b>Writing</b>	-Write a balanced argument.(arguments against and for rationing chocolate)	Whole class teaching	Ep 1 Teacher modelling, gathering examples of arguments from students(Introduction and 1 <sup>st</sup> argument: economy)( 4'minutes)P.4-5  Ep.2 Teacher modelling, gathering examples of arguments from students.( 2 <sup>nd</sup> argument: Experts )( 3'minutes)P.5-6
<b>Lesson 6 ;12/02/14 711 0112</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	-Set the task' instructions	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 Teacher gave general instructions for the task-sustained writing (8' minutes) P. 1-2
<b>Discussion content</b>	-Clarify the structure and sort of arguments for the piece of writing.	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 Discussing on success criteria; the structure of a balanced argument( 5' minutes ) (P.2-4)
<b>Writing</b>	Write a balanced argument.	Independent work	Ep. 1 Modelling; structure of balanced argument / argument against and for the economy( 5' minutes)P.5-6)  Ep 2 32' minutes allocated for writing.
<b>Lesson 7 ;19/03/14</b>			

<b>711 0148</b>			
<b>Phases</b>	<b>Specific purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	Announce the main task to be carried out.	Whole class teaching	Ep1. Teacher explain the task consist of writing a descriptive writing; the story of the creation. ( 1' minute ) P. 2
<b>Discussion content</b>	Discuss on type of sentences that should be included in a description	Whole class teaching	Ep. 1 Discussion on types of sentences to write a description (4' Minutes). P.2-4.
<b>Writing</b>	Write sentences that contains oxymoron, metaphor, simile, personification, Idiom.	Collaborative group work	Ep.1 Each table write one sort of sentence (different types). (3' minutes allocated for doing this job until the bomb goes off).
<b>Revision work</b>	Provide Verbal comment on students work.	Whole class teaching	8 students read out their work (10' minutes) P.5-7 Ep 1; G.1 Oxymoron (1' minute) P.5 Ep 2; G.2 Metaphor( 1' minute) P.5 Ep 3; G.3 Simile (1' minute)P.5 Ep 4; G.4 Personification /apostrophe ( 4' minutes)P.6 Ep 5; G.5Idiom (2' minutes) P.7 Ep 6; comment by other pupil P.8
<b>Lesson 8: 19/03/2014 711-0149</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific Purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Episodes.</b>
<b>Writing</b>	Write sentences that	Collaborative group	Ep.1 Each table has to write one sort of sentence, from the

	contains subordinate clause, Ing word, three adjectives.	work	list (previously discussed and assigned by the teacher). 3' minutes allocated for doing this.
<b>Revision work</b>	Provide Verbal comment on students work.	Whole class teaching	Ep 1; G.1 Subordinate clause (1' -1/2minute) P.1 Ep 2; G.2 Ing word( 2 minutes) P.1-2 Ep 3; G.3 Three ed or three adjectives (3'minutes)P.2
<b>Writing</b>	Write sentences that contain the whole repertoire rehearsed previously.	Collaborative group work	Ep. 1 22' minutes allocated for writing.
<b>Lesson 9;19/03/2014 711-0150</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Specific Purpose</b>	<b>Organizational context</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
<b>Writing</b>	Write sentences that contain the whole repertoire rehearsed previously.	Collaborative group work	Ep 1 30' minutes allocated to finish the writing activity initiated the previous lesson.
<b>Revision work</b>	Provide verbal comments on students' work	Whole class teaching	Ep.1 side episode, students expressing the joy in writing. ( 3' minutes)P.3  Ep.2 Teacher reading out the students sentences and commenting on that ( 10' minutes) P.4-5

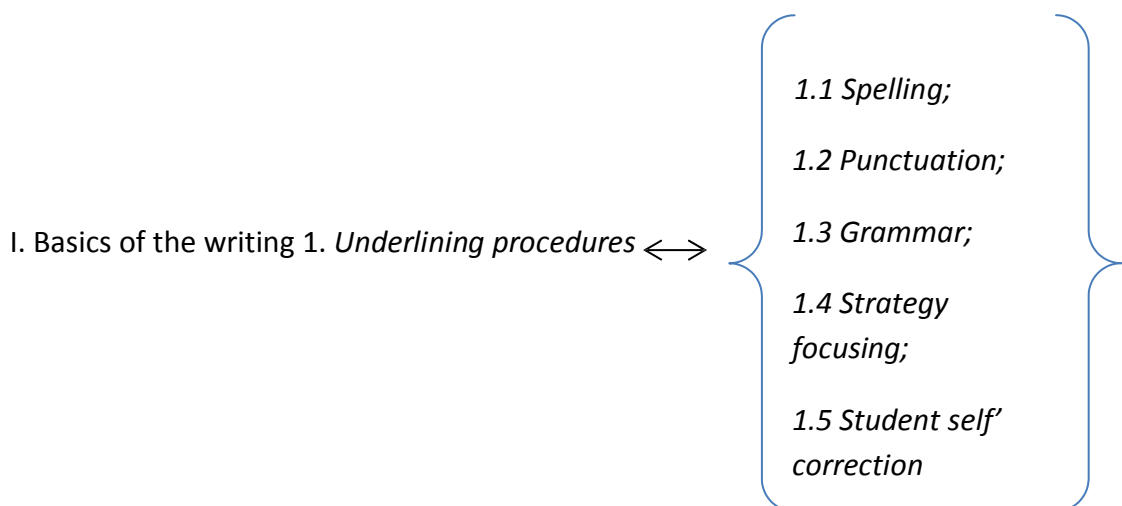
## Appendix 3

### Categorising interview data

Areas developed by teachers regarding written forms of feedback: basics of the writing; feedback related to content; and self-and-peer assessment: challenges.

- **Basics of the writing**

All the participant teachers were able to provide explanations of the craftsmanship of their practices and the intentions that led their decisions when marking their pupils' work. This allowed me to find commonalities and differences within the teachers' accounts. Bearing in mind what was common and also what appeared significant for them, I have termed this part of the data under the code basics of the writing', then, I determined the sub-code 'underlining procedures' to explore the data as a process in which rest this part of the marking. Next, five categories are allocated to the statements under this code, which helped to deal with the subtle differences in the ways that the individual teachers were approaching the marking of the basics as well as their individual interpretations. This is outlined in the figure below:



In what follows, I will introduce one example from the interview transcript to illustrate a code, sub-code and category:

*...so, for me, I would mark a spelling wrong if it was a high frequency word that they should know, or, if it was a subject specific word that they should know. So, for instance, if they keep spelling Egypt wrong, then, you have got to pick that up because it it's a subject specific word that they should know...(Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School.CS1-Int 1:1)*

- 1. Focusing basic errors
- 1.1 Spelling
- 1.4 Strategy focusing

- **Content**

The teachers' descriptions of the different dimensions within the feedback messages helped to reflect a view of what feedback should be, and this part has to do with content. Content was considered as a suitable a code that captured notions arising from participants' explanations on use of comments. For instance, it can provide insight regarding what the teacher was trying to get the students to do. Moreover, it can illustrate a teacher's perspective with respect to what quality means in a piece of writing. To mention some examples, for one teacher feedback can be centred on expressions of the meaning at the language level in order to enhance the piece of writing, while, another participant may embrace the idea that 'Good' work in English is more than good quality Language expression.

The code, sub-code and categories are represented below:

II. Content 2. Using written comments



2.1 Communicating L.O met;

2.2 Giving positive information;

2.3 Seeking further action;

2.4 Assessing quality

In what follows, I will introduce one example from the interview transcripts to illustrate categories and sub-code under the code termed Content:

*... with the science bit she hadn't quite got enough in there so, the idea is that I can now ask her to add one more sentence to the science bit and I have given her the words that I want her to include because if she includes them, she will have included the science I wanted her to include, with the idea of the earth spinning and that's what gives us day and night.* (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School. Int- 1:2)  $\Leftrightarrow$

II. Content.

2. Using comments

2.3 Seeking further action

- **Self and peer assessment: challenges**

While the previous codes, namely, the basics of the writing and content explore the teachers' actions and decisions related to marking their students' writing tasks, this code self and peer assessment: challenges, probes the participants' reflections on the extent to which their written feedback may affect their pupils. More specifically, this covered how the participants thought their intended purpose when delivering feedback were understood by the pupils, and/or how they believed the pupils' role was developed within marking processes. Some of the participants reported spontaneously on this matter, other were asked to elaborate on it during the interviews. Their narratives raised questions for me regarding what a teacher thought their pupils were being capable of in terms of recognising quality in a piece of writing, communicating this to their peers or teacher, and, finally, acting on by reflecting it in their own work.

The code '*self and peer assessment: challenges*', encompasses the teachers' views on the students' understanding of what could be learnt, This stated as the sub-code '*working with learning objectives and success criteria*'. As shown below, this, in turn, was broken down into categories that explore the different ways that the individual teachers approached these:

*III. Self and peer assessment: challenges*

*3. Working with learning objectives and success criteria*



*3.1 Unpacking the meaning by the student*

*3.2 Referring back to individual targets.*

*3.3 Keeping the learners on track*

*3.4 Expressing disbelief about peer marking.*

An utterance from the interview transcripts are provided to exemplify the code, sub-code and categories.

*... If I assess your piece of work on the learning objective, what am I looking for? Because I think children have got into the habit of writing a learning objective ...but I still think we haven't quite got to grips with using it. Knowing what the learning objective is, and using that to inform us whether or not we have done a good piece of work. I think there is still a bit of a way to go yet... (Sophie, St Andrew's Primary School.CS1-Int 1:3)*

III. Self and-peer assessment: challenges

3.-Working with L.O and S.C

3.1. Unpacking the meaning by the students.

## Appendix 4

### Transcription Key for classroom episodes

S	Unidentified child speaking
S1; S2; S3	First child, second child, third child etc.
[...]	A few seconds of transcript omitted', i.e. when the teacher makes observations about students' behaviour.
<u>Clues</u>	Word emphasized by raising intonation
<u>We are going to be detectives</u>	Phrase emphasized by raising intonation
<i>(Italics )</i>	Non textual material, annotations by the researcher to help in the understanding of the context of the interaction. For instance: <i>(Pupil does not respond)</i> <i>(The teacher goes around observing pupils' work)</i> . <i>(The teacher writing it down on the white board)</i>
<i>[" Italics"]</i>	A piece of text is incorporated which can be a sample of a piece of writing that a student read aloud or a piece of text that teacher was using for modelling.
...	The interaction illustrated within the transcript is part of a longer exchange.



## Appendix 5:

### Extracts from Interview with a teacher and codes assigned

Transcription from audio	Codes
<p>5 V: yes, but, describing your experience doing marking...</p> <p>6 T: Okay, that's fine. When we developed a marking policy there wasn't a consistent one</p> <p>7 across the school, so we had to develop something that would work for all of us, which is</p> <p>8 why we came up with symbols to represent certain things.</p> <p>9 But then we went through a process of how much do you mark? How much do you say is</p> <p>10 incorrect? If you have a child who is a very weak speller, do you pick up every spelling</p> <p>11 mistake? Because that can be disruptive, if you have got so much on their work that is</p> <p>12 wrong, they find that very difficult. So you have to make a decision as to what you are</p> <p>13 going to mark and what you are going to ignore.</p> <p>14 So for me, I would mark a spelling wrong if it was a high frequency word - one that they</p> <p>15 should know or if it was a subject specific word that they should know. So for instance</p> <p>16 when we are doing Egypt, if they keep spelling wrong then you have got to pick that up</p> <p>17 because it's a subject specific word that they should know.</p> <p>18 On the other hand if they were writing a story but they were consistently spelling "with"</p> <p>19 incorrectly, you would pick that up because it is a high frequency word that they should</p> <p>20 know. But if they have written a word in their story like "amazing", or something like that,</p> <p>21 and they haven't spelled that correctly, you wouldn't necessarily pick that up because it is</p> <p>22 an unfamiliar word and it's one that is not regularly used.</p>	<p><b>1.Focusing on basic errors</b></p> <p><b>1.1Underlining procedures</b></p> <p><i>Strategy focusing</i> (lines 9-13)</p> <p><i>Strategy focusing</i> (example) (lines15-17)</p> <p><i>Strategy focusing</i> (example) (lines-18-20)</p>

<p>36 V: What about the comments that you wrote here?</p> <p>37 T: I like ...I used to write out that you have met the learning objective but it takes too long  38 so we just now put “LO met”, which she has.  39 I like to always say what I think about their writing, whether I think it is great or I think they  40 tried hard or that kind of thing. And I did particularly like the way she had structured  41 sentences – they sounded ... it sounded knowledgeable. It sounded as though she knew  42 what she was writing and she had written it with an understanding.  43 However, with the science bit she hadn’t quite got enough in there so, the idea is that I can  44 now ask her to add one more sentence to the science bit and I have given her the words  45 that I want her to include because if she includes them, she will have included the science I  46 wanted her to include, with the idea of the earth spinning and that’s what gives us day and  47 night.</p> <p>48 So what we try to do is make a comment about how this piece of work is, whether they have  49 met the learning objective and then give them a next step. If you did this, this would make  50 your work better. Or, the next time you do a piece of work like this remember to ... and you  51 give them things that they need to work on.</p> <p>52 T: And we expect them to respond because we mark in purple pen, the children will  53 respond in green pen so that you can clearly see, You are having a dialogue with the  54 children in their books and so anybody looking through their books can see, oh well this is  55 what the teacher wrote and this is what the child responded.</p>	<p><b>2.-Content.</b></p> <p><b>2.1 using written comments</b></p> <p><i>L.O met(lines 37-38)</i></p> <p><i>Giving Positive information(lines 39-42)</i></p> <p><i>Seeking further action (line 44)2.4 assessing quality writing (lines 43-47)</i></p>
<p>83 V: If I interpreted well, the idea is... how they can understand the criteria? Are those things possible to change?</p> <p>84 T: I think it is, but it needs a lot of modelling. The teacher has to model how this is going to</p>	<p><b>III.Peer-and-self-assessment: challenges</b></p>

<p>85 happen, what does this look like. If I assess your piece of work on the learning objective,  86 what am I looking for? Because I think children have got into the habit of writing a learning  87 objective and we talk through success criteria, [sometimes we make it for them, sometimes  88 they make it themselves], but I still think we haven't quite got to grips with using it.  89 Knowing what the learning objective is, [looking at the success criteria] and using that to  90 inform us whether or not we have done a good piece of work. I think there is still a bit of a  91 way to go yet. But we are only at the very beginning with this so the children will take a  92 little while to learn.</p> <p>93 V: In the comments you ask the students to write something again, you know, in this case to  complete the sentence...</p> <p>94 T: Yes, here I actually structured the sentence for her. I gave her a frame to write within  95 because she is of a lower ability than this child. This child I can just give three words and she  96 will use that. This child is of a lower ability so I have actually structured the sentence and  97 she just needs to continue it. So I have framed it for her so she doesn't have to go ... you  98 know, she doesn't have to think of it completely for herself.</p> <p>99 V: And, in this case, I think is different...</p> <p>100T: This is a lower ability one, yes.</p> <p>101V: You said here: write a sentence but ...</p> <p>102T: Again, he's been given words to use. He's not actually very low ability. If it was a  103 very low ability child, I would write the whole sentence out and just leave out two  104 words – they would have to fill the words in.</p> <p>105V: Okay?</p> <p>106So ... You might give words and they have to structure the sentence, you might give  107 the beginning of the sentence and they have to finish it, or you give the whole  108 sentence with just a couple of words missing and they have to put those in –  109 depending on the level of the child.</p>	<div data-bbox="1576 336 1859 408" data-label="Section-Header"> <h3>3.Working with L.O/ S.C</h3> </div> <p data-bbox="1576 440 1859 592"> <i>"Unpacking the meanings by the student"</i>  <i>(lines 85-91)</i> </p> <div data-bbox="1576 695 1859 727" data-label="Section-Header"> <h3>II.-Content.</h3> </div> <div data-bbox="1576 783 1859 855" data-label="Section-Header"> <h3>2. using written comments</h3> </div> <p data-bbox="1576 935 1859 1038"> <i>2.3 Seeking further action (lines 84- 88;92-94;96-98)</i> </p>
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I. Basics of the writing; 1. Underlining procedures. (*Spelling; strategy focusing*)



II. Content; 2. Using comments. (*Communicating L.O. met; Giving positive information; seeking further action; Assessing quality writing*)



I II. Peer-and-self-assessment: challenges; 3. Working with Learning objective and success criteria.  
(Unpacking the by the student) .